

Defeat in Victory: Organizational Learning Dysfunction in Counterinsurgency

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ABSTRACT

Two puzzles dominate the study of organizational learning and counterinsurgency. First, militaries often struggle to develop effective strategies to address the problem of counterinsurgency. Second, their strategic performance seldom improves over successive counterinsurgency campaigns. This study offers a theoretical explanation for these dominant patterns of learning dysfunction. It argues that a set of closely held, professional beliefs - the military operational code - and bureaucratic preferences distort the organizations' initial response, subsequent adaptation and interwar retention. The military operational code leads militaries to misunderstand counterinsurgency in a systematic and debilitating fashion; bureaucratic interests lead them to reject the most effective strategies once they have been uncovered. When militaries manage to break with this dysfunctional pattern, it is because their professional judgment is constrained; high civilian participation and/or resource scarcity often force militaries to adopt political strategies that are less congenial but more effective in restoring state authority.

This study tests the theory against six empirical cases: Indochina, the Indochina-Algeria interlude, Algeria, British Palestine, Malaya, and Thailand. These cases strongly suggest that the dysfunctional learning patterns are the product of broadly shared, professional beliefs and bureaucratic interests rather than the common, alternative explanations based on experience, culture or normative and material constraints.

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Part I

The Theory

Chapter 1

Puzzles and Punch Lines

The Puzzles

Why do militaries struggle to develop effective counterinsurgency strategies?

Why doesn't their performance improve across successive counterinsurgency campaigns?

The first puzzle involves a conspicuous failure to adapt in wartime; the second an inability to retain hard won lessons in peacetime. Taken together, these two puzzles are at the heart of past and present debates on counterinsurgency. Across time and national traditions, the most skilled and professional armies of their day have often labored and lost against insurgent forces that were demonstrably inferior in weaponry, training and sophistication. Even in those instances where they have defeated their insurgent opponents, military establishments have been wont to "forget" the very strategies that brought them success. Why?

Militaries have faltered in all three stages of adaptation: their initial response to counterinsurgency, intrawar adaptation, and interwar learning and retention. Most respond to insurgency by mounting conventional military operations against their guerilla opponents – a faithful application of the historically established "worst practices" of counterinsurgency.¹ Nor have they proven more adept at overcoming these initial missteps. Instead, intrawar adaptation to counterinsurgency has been slow, costly, distorted, incomplete and impermanent. In spite of considerable investments of resources, effort and time, militaries have often failed to make appreciable headway towards their stated objective: the restoration of a durable, low cost political order. Even

¹ I owe Barry Posen this turn of phrase.

when militaries have derived valid insights from their experience, they have generally failed to retain, let alone build upon them. Instead, militaries have celebrated the end of such campaigns by purging many of these lessons. Far from improving their performance across conflicts, professional militaries appear doomed to relive the same tortured progression of inappropriate response, delayed strategic search, errant choice and postwar purge.

Many scholars and practitioners have noted these regularities but few have offered convincing general explanations.² In some quarters, learning failure has been dismissed as an illustration of the general adaptive weakness of all military organizations; all militaries are inept learners; their scale, hierarchy, homogeneity, insularity and lassitude of these organizations impair learning in all contexts. Others have argued that the problem is the novelty of the task. Modern armies are highly specialized organizations trained to wage conventional war, and hence maladroit response and slow adaptation to a new task should not be surprising. Still others have singled out the role of flawed priors; militaries fail to adapt to counterinsurgency because they apply the wrong ideas to this variety of conflict.

While plausible, these explanations, on closer examination, remain incomplete and unsatisfying. Intrawar and interwar adaptive performance in conventional, interstate war does vary. While it is true that certain militaries have struggled to innovate within the conventional realm, the regularity of learning failure in counterinsurgency is striking.

² Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (New York: Praeger, 1966); Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency & Peacekeeping* (New Delhi: Natraj Publishers, 1992); Roger Trinquier, *La guerre moderne* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1961); Thomas R. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-1960* (London: Macmillan, 1990); Thomas R. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the post-imperial era* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Ian F.W. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerillas and their Opponents since 1750* (London: Routledge, 2001); Hew Strachan (ed.), *Big Wars and Small Wars: The British army and the lessons of war in the twentieth century* (Routledge, 2006).

Nor is it true that counterinsurgency is novel in any historical sense. Far from being new or rare, insurgency, even in its recognizably modern form, has been prominent problem facing military establishments since at least the late eighteenth century.³ War, in all its forms, is a rare event, but insurgency is no more uncommon than conventional war; it is less a “bolt from the blue” than a periodic and foreseeable natural disaster – the proverbial thirty or fifty year hurricane. The observation that priors distort learning is valid but maddeningly incomplete. Where do these priors come from? Why do they persist in the face of contradictory evidence? Why are militaries unable to recognize and overcome these flawed priors?

The Argument

I argue that the stereotype of military organizations as insensitive to the task environment of counterinsurgency is false. Far from being inert, militaries do change in response to counterinsurgency. The central question is not whether militaries learn; it is what they learn, what they retain, and why. I argue that a combination of professional beliefs and bureaucratic preferences distort organizational learning, making much of what armies learn from their counterinsurgency experience irrelevant or counterproductive. Their strategies and investments consume finite resources and time but do not bring the state any closer to its political objective – the restoration of a political order that can survive the removal of large numbers of military forces.

³ This is a conservative estimate of the novelty of insurgency and counterinsurgency. The British campaigns in the American Revolution and the Napoleonic campaigns in the Vendée, Spain, and Calabria are clearly recognizable examples of modern counterinsurgency. The case could be made that rebellion is as old as organized government, making the problem as old as man. That said, the differences in levels of political mobilization do make a rough distinction between modern and pre-modern cases meaningful.

Militaries misunderstand counterinsurgency, seeing in the violent political struggle the familiar outlines of interstate war. Once they have framed counterinsurgency in these terms, they embark on a frustrating journey from conventional response to political war. When, after much wasted effort, they come to understand what is necessary to win, they develop a strong distaste for the answer. The organizational changes that maximize the chances of success impinge on the autonomy, resources and prestige of the military institution. While militaries may be willing to put up with unpalatable changes under wartime pressure, the end of the campaign signals the beginning of a vigorous organizational backlash. Learning failure in counterinsurgency is a two step, with misunderstanding followed by revulsion.

The Dominant Pattern: Models 1, 2, and 3

Military learning in counterinsurgency follows a predictable and dysfunctional pattern. First, militaries tend to devote more energy to the refinement of existing solutions than to the search for effective strategy; in most cases, the exploitation of familiar routines becomes a substitute for strategic exploration.⁴ Second, when militaries do engage in strategic search, their prior beliefs and preferences distort that search. Their strategic choices fall into one of three categories. The most common response to insurgency is to wage a “small war” against the rebels (Model 1), an approach that produces gratifying tactical military successes but campaign stalemate. Most militaries respond to this paradox of micro-success and macro-stalemate by exploitation – the refinement of existing military routines and the investment of greater manpower and

⁴ James G. March, “Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning,” *Organization Science*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (February 1991).

capital. When exploitation fails to unlock stalemate, they shift from an attack on the rebels to an attempt to control the population (Model 2). This new and explicitly political war demands new weapons and new targets; militaries develop psychological and economic weapons and to control the behavior of several audiences - the local population, their own forces, the domestic population, and the enemy. The great appeal of this new formula is its compatibility with the familiar paradigm of battle. Militaries can incorporate political considerations without overthrowing their core problem solving paradigm. If politics is simply war by other means, then militaries can use new political weapons to batter or bribe new targets into submission. Too often, the application of Model 2 leads to a costly, new plateau. Military forces may control local politics through the application of incentives, but they are unable to step away without the structure collapsing.

Model 3 recasts counterinsurgency as a problem of violent negotiation. Though Model 3 strategies may share routines with Models 1 and 2, its underlying assumptions, logic and goals of Model 3 are dramatically different. Models 1 and 2 assume that the counterinsurgency forces can dictate outcomes through the exercise of coercive force against rebels and the population. By contrast, Model 3 assumes that the counterinsurgency forces have limited agency and that the population is an actor rather than a target. According to this reasoning, counterinsurgency forces can impose coercive control, but cannot construct a lasting political order without the consent of the governed. The shift in emphasis from coercive control to consensual authority thrusts the military into the unfamiliar and distasteful realm of two-way politics. For most militaries,

negotiating while fighting smacks of weakness and the intrinsic ambiguity of negotiation only exacerbates the problem of measuring campaign performance.

While Model 3 offers militaries the greatest chance of lasting success, it is the least frequently chosen and the most rapidly jettisoned. To reach it, they must overcome two distinct unlearning hurdles; they must recognize the limits of “small war” against the rebels (Model 1), and then the limits of one-way politics in restoring low cost, state authority (Model 2). To make the leap from a Model 1 starting point to a Model 3 strategy requires two epiphanies and two rounds of political re-education. When militaries adopt Model 3 strategies, they do so grudgingly; these foreign strategies are frequently discarded as soon as more palatable alternatives are again possible.

When they adopt Model 3 strategies, it has less to do with professional judgment than with material or organizational constraints on military choice. Extreme resource scarcity can rule out the preferred small war and political war strategies, leaving military leaders few alternatives to violent bargaining or negotiation. In other cases, extensive civilian participation in counterinsurgency strategy can force alternative interpretations of campaign performance and hasten the move from Models 1 and 2 to Model 3.

Progress from Models 1 to 2 to 3 is ephemeral. The further militaries move from the core constructs of counterinsurgency as battle, the greater the pressure to revert to Model 1 when circumstances permit. Even in the course of a single counterinsurgency campaign, the provision of additional resources or autonomy can lead military decision makers to abandon Model 2 and Model 3 strategies in favor of the more familiar Model 1 construct.

Beliefs, Preferences and Task Pressure

What produces this particular pattern of dysfunctional learning? Two sets of pressures, one cognitive and the other bureaucratic, distort the timing, order and extent of search. The core beliefs or dominant logic⁵ of the military profession – the military operational code (MOC)⁶ – influences choice in predictable and largely counterproductive ways. This bundle of causal and normative beliefs is the foundation of effective performance in conventional war. At its core is a problem solving model based on coercion and battle – the one-way, application of force to compel submission. The military operational code also provides a set of simple, valid, and highly reliable indicators of task performance. The MOC has proven so effective over time that militaries assume it is a general guide to action in all cases of mass violence.

The MOC distorts organizational learning in three ways. First, it invites inappropriate initial response. The symptoms of insurgency – mass violence, armed opponents, and small battles - superficially resemble those of conventional war; under these conditions, most militaries succumb to the illusion of familiarity and apply a conventional solution. Rather than consider the best strategy to restore state authority, leaders assume that the military defeat of their armed opponents will allow them to dictate the desired political outcome. In short, the MOC makes the decision to apply Model 1 solutions a patterned response rather than a considered choice.

⁵ C.K. Prahalad, Richard Bettis, “The Dominant Logic: A new linkage between diversity and performance,” *Strategic Management Journal*, 1986, Volume 7, pp. 485-501.

⁶ Nathan Leites coined the term “operational code” in his study of Bolshevik reasoning, *The Operational Code of the Politburo: A Systematic Analysis of the Political Strategy of Communism and the Rules by which it Operates* (New York: The RAND Corporation, 1951).

The MOC also delays the recognition of strategic failure. Since the MOC includes not only a standard prescription but also a set of performance indicators, it focuses the leadership's attention on the results of the military operations. Since the counterinsurgency forces are generally far stronger and better equipped than the rebels, almost all military engagements will end in counterinsurgency victories. The string of "small victories" masks the underlying lack of progress towards the desired political objective. Even when the gap between local successes and campaign results becomes clear, the first response will be to exploit existing solutions – to refine existing routines and escalate the scale and intensity of the military effort. In this sense, the MOC sets up a "learning trap" in which positive military performance delays the search for more effective and more political strategies.

Even when stalemate becomes clear and exploitation options have been exhausted, the MOC distorts the order and extent of search. Forced to acknowledge the political dimension of counterinsurgency, militaries tend to choose strategies that are compatible with the coercive model of the MOC. Model 2 strategies enable militaries to incorporate economic and political considerations without discarding the coercive framework of the MOC. Once militaries have adopted Model 2, they see no reason to explore the more alien and disruptive political strategies of Model 3.

While professional beliefs play the leading role in explaining intrawar learning failure, the bureaucratic preferences of the military also exert an important influence. Militaries are bureaucratic organizations that seek to maximize their autonomy, resources, and prestige. As such, they resist the adoption and retention of strategies that undermine these equities. Models 2 and 3 both threaten these interests. Both restrict the

autonomy of the military, forcing military leaders to subordinate conventional operations to political considerations. While Models 2 and 3 may increase the flow off resources, the military is seldom able to channel those resources into its preferred investments (e.g. capital modernization). What is more, military immersion in politics puts the institution's prestige at increased risk. Strategies that rest on political control or political stratagems are seldom short or decisive; they are generally long term, high risk and low return investments. Model 2 and 3 strategies also thrust soldiers into less prestigious roles as social workers, policemen, or worst of all politicians. Finally, both models increase the risk of "dirty war" incidents that damage the prestige of the institution. Once militaries recognize that the most effective counterinsurgency strategies come at a steep institutional cost, they will avoid them if at all possible. Wartime pressure may temporarily suppress these parochial considerations; militaries may grudgingly accept solutions in wartime that would be unacceptable in peacetime. In the intrawar period, the military's intrinsic distaste for Models 2 and 3 is expressed in the pace and order of search. In the interwar period, this distaste takes the form of an active purge of Model 2 and 3 strategies and capabilities.

Task pressure acts as the switching mechanism between the two sets of pressures – one cognitive and the other bureaucratic. When task pressure is high and insurgency threatens the survival of the state, as in many cases of domestic counterinsurgency, cognitive bias is paramount and motivated bias relatively insignificant. When task pressure is moderate, as in most cases of expeditionary counterinsurgency, cognitive bias plays the leading role but parochial interests may influence the pace, order, and extent of

search. In the interwar period, when task pressure is low or entirely absent,⁷ parochial interests dominate military reactions to counterinsurgency.

Variation in Learning Performance

While these beliefs and interests produce a dominant pattern, they are not dispositive. Militaries do deviate from this pattern, though primarily as a result of binding constraint rather than choice. All things being equal, the professional beliefs of military encourage a slow and halting march from Model 1 to Model 2 and perhaps, in the closing act, to Model 3. In cases of extreme resource scarcity, however, militaries may be forced to explore explicitly political and even consensual political solutions much earlier than they otherwise would. Active civilian participation in the framing, execution and evaluation of counterinsurgency strategy may accelerate search and steer it away from the pitfalls of Models 1 and 2.

The Interwar Purge

When militaries adopt Model 2 and Model 3 strategies in wartime, they seldom retain them in peacetime. Professional beliefs and bureaucratic preferences make both models prime candidates for postwar rejection. The causal beliefs implicit in Model 3 are diametrically opposed to the MOC. To retain Models 3 a single military organization would have to maintain two, antithetical sets of cognitive reflexes – a MOC emphasizing coercion and one way compellance, and an alternative code emphasizing consent and

⁷ While there is no immediate task pressure in peacetime, militaries are, in theory, influenced by the expectations of future war. As the history of interwar counterinsurgency shows, preferences typically trump rational expectations; when the threat of future war is low, militaries are more likely to prepare for the scenarios that they would prefer to fight rather than those they are most likely to confront.

negotiation. The problem is not simply that counterinsurgency is a different task; it is that it requires the same organization to distinguish between different types of mass violence and respond in dramatically different fashion depending on that classification. The default answer to the dilemma of dual reflexes is to jettison counterinsurgency reflexes in favor of the simplicity and familiarity of the MOC.

What is more, the disappearance of task pressure propels bureaucratic considerations to the fore and militaries eliminate strategies that are antithetical to their parochial interests. Routines are more likely to be retained than strategies, and these routines are judged on their contributions to conventional war rather than their utility in counterinsurgency. While the interwar purge amounts to functional self-mutilation, militaries do it in order to avoid future counterinsurgency campaigns. Tragically, they cannot choose their next wars, and the protective purge simply guarantees that they will enter the next counterinsurgency campaign at the ground floor.

This argument upends much of the conventional wisdom on organizational learning in counterinsurgency. These learning disabilities are not the products of flawed organizational design or the peculiar national histories of specific militaries – they are the product of a set of professional beliefs and interests that distort functional adaptation. The problem is not the novelty of counterinsurgency but its deceptive familiarity, an illusion that encourages militaries to expend time and resources in a fruitless pursuit of military decision. The search for effective counterinsurgency strategies is the military's struggle to understand politics: its significance, its laws of cause and effect, and its relationship to the familiar instruments of force. Here the military's conceptual starting point exerts a powerful influence, leading it first to ignore, then to misunderstand, and

finally to reject the relationship between politics and conflict termination. The clash between two views of politics – one predicated on coercion and control and the other on consent and authority - often determines the success or failure of the counterinsurgency campaign.

Similarly, this argument challenges a number of strongly held notions about the role of resources, civilian intervention and task pressure. Contrary to the protestations of most military commanders, the chief obstacle to adaptation is not excessive civilian intervention; it is civilian abdication and military hegemony in counterinsurgency strategy. In the material dimension, the problem is seldom the shortage of troops but rather the numbing effect of their superabundance. And the interwar period is not, as some scholars have suggested, a sanctuary for the development of improved strategy or doctrine.⁸ In the case of counterinsurgency at least, the disappearance of task pressure is the prelude to a deliberate purge of the strategies political leaders will need most in subsequent campaigns.

What the Study is and What it is Not

This is not a study of campaign outcomes. Simply put, states can win without learning, and learn without winning.⁹ At least three things separate organizational learning from outcomes: circumstances, strategic interaction, and chance. A range of circumstantial variables - the social and political environment, the existence of powerful external sponsors, the availability of internal or external sanctuaries, and the like - make

⁸ Stephen Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 253.

⁹ I owe Roger Petersen this turn of phrase.

certain counterinsurgency problems more difficult than others.¹⁰ Second, the insurgents and population play important roles in the outcome of these struggles. While this study focuses almost exclusively on the actions of the counterinsurgency force, this is a conscious methodological choice; campaign outcomes depend on the interaction of the counterinsurgent and insurgent strategies. Third, as Clausewitz noted, war is the realm of chance. These three factors – circumstances, interaction, and chance –make a distinction between learning performance and outcomes imperative.

Instead, this is a study of organizational adaptation to a specific task set. The question is how well military organizations play the hands they are dealt and why. The political objective in all counterinsurgency is the restoration of a political order durable enough to survive the removal of major military forces. Solutions that bring the military closer to this goal are functional; those that consume resources and time without doing so are dysfunctional. Solutions that restore state control only through the perpetual exercise of very high levels of force are unsustainable and failures in the long run. The measure of learning performance is the rate and extent of convergence on the highest payoff counterinsurgency model – Model 3.

This is also a study of the role of ideas and material factors in shaping organizational behavior. While certain strongly held beliefs and preferences explain the general pattern of organizational behavior in counterinsurgency, material constraints can alter this pattern. Though organization science remains divided on the influence of resources on innovation, in counterinsurgency resource scarcity appears to improve

¹⁰ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (St. Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2005), pp. 26-27; Ibid. Thompson, pp. 16-20.

learning performance. Ironically, militaries are at their best when they lack the resources to do themselves and their cause great harm.

While individual and organizational learning are closely related, this study focuses on the behavior of large organizations rather than individual leaders. The development of effective counterinsurgency strategies is far more than a thought experiment – it is a test of the ability of leaders to impose effective solutions on their organizations. In almost every counterinsurgency campaign we can identify a handful of leaders who pierced the illusion of familiarity and identified optimal strategies early on. But vision without influence is tragedy, and the history of counterinsurgency is littered with powerful leaders who have failed to impose sound but heretical ideas on reluctant organizations.

Structure of the Dissertation

This study is divided into three parts. Part I presents the theory and a series of alternative explanations for the puzzles. Part II examines the theory using three French cases. The object of this section is to test the internal validity of the theory within a single national tradition. Part III tests the theory against a series of shadow cases. These cases help establish the explanatory range of the theory.

Alternative explanations

The literature on counterinsurgency suggests a number of competing explanations for the puzzles of intrawar and interwar learning failure. While there is no shortage of plausible explanations, they are largely underdeveloped and untested. We are left with

three broad categories of explanation and a series of loosely defined propositions. None is implausible or entirely invalid; each casts some light on the puzzles without illuminating them in full. The first category explains learning failure in terms of the availability and processing of experience. The second emphasizes the influence of ideas on organizational learning. The third category attributes learning failure to material and normative constraints. This section outlines the arguments and observable implications of each category. Then we compare these propositions with the historical case set and identify the strengths and weaknesses of each argument. All this sets the stage for the controlled comparison of the theory proposed here with the leading alternative explanations.

Experience

A number of authors have sought to explain learning failure in terms of experience. In these arguments, the availability of counterinsurgency experience or the organizational processing of that experience drive the military into inappropriate response and ineffective search.

The simplest form of the argument is that learning performance in counterinsurgency is a function of the stock of counterinsurgency experience. Militaires with extensive counterinsurgency experience should outperform those new to the task, and performance should improve over the course of successive campaigns. All things being equal, recent experience is more useful than distant or second hand experience.

Even if we allow for some decay in proficiency over time, we should expect long run military progress in counterinsurgency to be smooth and cumulative.¹¹

This relatively common sense explanation does not survive close scrutiny. First, there is very little to support the claim that counterinsurgency is novel. Internal war appears just as common as interstate war; over the past half century, the leading Western militaries have been far more likely to engage in counterinsurgency than traditional, interstate war. More important, there is no clear evidence that past and even recent exposure to counterinsurgency improves subsequent learning performance. Militaries with extensive counterinsurgency experience appear as likely as novices to fall into the dominant intrawar pattern: conventional military response, delayed search, errant choice. The inability of militaries to capitalize on very recent experience suggests that the novelty of counterinsurgency to any given generation of military leaders is largely artificial – the result of postwar doctrinal purges rather than simple decay.

The “last war” variant of this argument suggests that military posture is a function of the most recent wartime experience. When the second war closely resembles the first, they should perform well; when the war is quite different, performance, at least in the initial phases may suffer. If this is true, we should expect higher learning performance in the wake of counterinsurgency campaigns and lower performance in the wake of

¹¹ Natural decay in proficiency can be traced to two sources: personnel turnover and the difficulty of organizational recall. As personnel leave the organization, the number of individuals with personal experience in counterinsurgency decreases. The collective experience of the organization is also encoded and stored in the form of doctrine and standard operating procedures. Even after the last individual with personal experience in counterinsurgency has left the organization, the stored experience can, in theory, be recalled. It is reasonable to expect some lag in the recall of stored memories, but the shelf life of the stored lessons should be significantly higher than the personal experiences of the members. Based on these observations, and assuming unbiased encoding of lessons, we should expect a slow steady decay of direct experience based on turnover followed by a plateau as the organization comes to rely solely on stored lessons.

conventional wars. Even when militaries face no immediate postwar threat, we should expect them to tailor their interwar doctrine to the experience of the last war.

The historical record suggests no such pattern. Militaries emerging from counterinsurgency campaigns appear just as likely to respond to subsequent counterinsurgency problems with conventional war solutions. The British response to a humiliating defeat in Palestine in 1947 was to apply the much same methods in the early phases of Malaya.¹² After the Vietnam war, the U.S. military did not prepare for a new counterinsurgency campaign; instead, it jettisoned many of the lessons of Vietnam and focused its attention on a possible, future, conventional war in Europe.¹³ While the “last war” hypothesis provides clear predictions for interwar behavior and initial response, it is mute on the question of intrawar adaptive failure. The observed behavior of most militaries in the wake of counterinsurgency campaigns directly contradicts the “last war” claim. Instead of tailoring their doctrines to the last campaign, militaries tend to emerge from counterinsurgency with a renewed emphasis on conventional interstate war. This behavior suggest quite a different pattern: militaries tend to prepare for “preferred war” rather than the “last war” or the “most likely” war.

Other scholars attribute learning failure in counterinsurgency to the military’s low propensity to learn. The purported weaknesses of military organizations are legion: hierarchy, insularity, conservatism, and uniformity. If the generic propensity to learn is the primary issue, then we should expect adaptive performance across task sets to be

¹² Anthony Short, *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats: The Communist Insurrection in Malaya* (Singapore: Cultured Lotus, 2000), pp. 116-117; John Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency from Palestine to Northern Ireland* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 43-49.

¹³ Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The American Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 268-274; John D. Waghelstein, “What’s wrong in Iraq: Ruminations of a Pachyderm,” *Military Review* (January/February 2006).

uniformly low. Militaries should be equally ineffective learners in conventional war and counterinsurgency. Similarly, we should expect militaries that are exceptionally effective in adapting to conventional war challenges to exhibit equal performance in counterinsurgency settings.

Neither of these propositions is empirically supported. Learning failure in counterinsurgency appears both more regular and more intractable, and armies that have succeeded in conventional learning have often failed in counterinsurgency. The French, Prussian and German armies that set the standard for conventional military innovation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seldom developed effective solutions to the counterinsurgency challenges of the same period.¹⁴ If military organizations are generally insensitive to their task environments, and particularly to new tasks, then we should not expect them to respond aggressively to counterinsurgency stimuli. This too is at odds with observed military behavior in counterinsurgency. Militaries are generally avid if ineffective learners in counterinsurgency settings; they expend enormous amounts of time, energy and resources on improving their mobility, firepower, and intelligence capabilities. That these improvements bring them no closer to their political objective is a separate issue, less an issue of receptivity than of errant choice. On balance, militaries appear to be active but consistently dysfunctional learners in counterinsurgency.

A fourth variant of the experience argument focuses on information flows within the organization. Organizational learning is portrayed as a largely mechanical problem, in which the challenge is to identify lessons learned at the local level, repackage this

¹⁴ The Napoleonic armies struggled to suppress a major uprising in the Vendée and later failed in their counter-insurgency campaigns in Spain and Calabria. The German high command struggled to develop effective and economical solutions to the *franc-tireurs* in the Franco-Prussian war and both World Wars. While they possessed enormous resources and were ruthless in their application of collective responsibility, their strategies never established stable economical solutions to the problems of authority.

wisdom, and then disseminate it to the rest of the organization. Organizations that are open to inquiry and capable of processing local lessons quickly will be more effective learners. Though a number of authors have made these arguments in the conventional realm,¹⁵ John Nagl is the leading proponent in the recent literature on counterinsurgency. In his comparative study of British and American organizational learning in Malaya and Vietnam, Nagl operationalizes his concept of the “learning organization” by posing five questions:

- 1) Does the army promote suggestions from the field?
- 2) Are subordinates encouraged to question superiors and policies?
- 3) Does the organization regularly question its basic assumptions?
- 4) Are high-ranking officers routinely in close contact with those on the ground and open to their suggestions?
- 5) Are standard operating procedures (SOPs) generated locally and informally or imposed from the center?¹⁶

Nagl argues that armies that answer yes to these five questions are better equipped to adapt to the challenge of counterinsurgency. Nagl’s conclusion that the optimal learning organization is open and decentralized is consistent with a number of studies of tactical and operational innovation in conventional military conflicts; when the problem is how to overcome hedgerows in Normandy, static trench lines on the Western front, or how to coordinate air support, the organization that was open and decentralized often outperformed more rigid and centralized counterparts. Nagl transposes these ideas onto the problem of strategic innovation in counterinsurgency, arguing that the attributes that

¹⁵ Timothy T. Lufper, *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Change in German Tactical Doctrine during the First World War* (Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute, 1981); Michael D. Doubler, *Closing with the Enemy: How GIs Fought the War in Europe* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

¹⁶ John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), pp. 10.

make an organization successful in tactical or operational innovation in conventional war will bring success on a higher level of analysis and in a different task environment.¹⁷

If Nagl and others are correct that learning in counterinsurgency is primarily an issue of general receptivity and information processing, then there are several observable implications. First, we should see stable performance by specific militaries across task sets. Presumably a military that is flat, decentralized and encourages input from below should outperform more hidebound organizations in conventional war and counterinsurgency. This should hold true for strategic choice as much as tactical innovation. Second, if variation in these five dimensions explains observed, cross-national variation in learning performance, we should expect to see significant variation in these independent variables in historical cases.

Closer examination of American, British, French and German counterinsurgency performance undermines both these assertions. Michael Doubler makes a convincing case that the U.S. army in WWII was, by Nagl's tests, an outstanding learning organization, harnessing local innovation to overcome a series of tactical and operational challenges on the Western front.¹⁸ Nagl argues that this same American military had ceased to be a "learning institution" by Vietnam. In a foreword to his revised edition of his study, Nagl now characterizes the U.S. army in Iraq as an effective, learning organization. For an argument that seeks to anchor the learning attributes of particular militaries in their foundation experiences, this instability in the coding of organizations

¹⁷ It is worth noting that Stephen Rosen disagrees with Nagl on this point. Rosen draws a distinction between loose organizations optimally structured for minor innovation and the centralized, hierarchical organizations capable of engineering major wartime innovation (Source: Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 38-39.

¹⁸ Michael D. Doubler, *Closing with the Enemy: How GIs Fought the War in Europe* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994), pp. 266-273.

suggests two alternative interpretations. Either American learning performance varied by task set or cross-national variation in learning performance may have less to do with the deep historical foundations than Nagl suggests.

The historical record draws into question the level of variation in Nagl's independent variable or the dependent variable of learning performance. If we make a conscious distinction between campaign performance – who won counterinsurgency campaigns – and learning performance – how they played the hands they were dealt – we see a shared pattern of learning dysfunction rather than dramatic cross-national variation. British “success,” particularly in Malaya, may have had more to do with the degree of difficulty of particular insurgencies¹⁹ and their willingness to concede rather than contest political control.²⁰ Controlling for these circumstantial differences, the British, French and American armies were more effective in refining existing routines and processes than at identifying appropriate strategic responses to counterinsurgency. Where Nagl's hypotheses would lead us to expect large variation rooted in national and organizational culture and history, we see shared professional dysfunction.

The most glaring weaknesses of the information flows argument are its assumptions that learning is automatic and that innovation on the routine and strategic levels are essentially the same. Whereas wartime experience is notoriously ambiguous, overwhelming emphasis on the machinery of adaptation suggests that lessons are ready for the taking if organizations only increase their receptivity. In practice, learning, particularly strategic learning, is an act of interpretation and choice; the speed and ease of change count for little if that change brings the organization no closer to its stated goal.

¹⁹ Robert O. Tilman, “The Non-lessons of the Malayan Emergency,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 6, No. 8 (August 1966), pp. 407-419.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Newsinger, pp. 1-2.

Implicit in the information processing argument is the idea that tactical and strategic innovation are essentially the same; organizational attributes that improve tactical innovation or process refinement also improve strategic search. As this study will show, process refinement and strategic search are not simply distinct; they compete for the finite attention and resources of the organization. The search for new counterinsurgency strategies is not simply a scaled up version of the technical challenge of mastering jungle patrolling, and excessive emphasis on the less risky path of process refinement can delay the search for more effective strategy.

Ideas: Cultural Explanations of Learning Failure

Other observers point to national or organizational culture as the primary explanation of learning failure in counterinsurgency. According to this argument, culture, generally defined as a set of shared beliefs and preferences, will cause particular groups to respond differently to the same wartime stimulus.²¹ Whether these shared traits are national or organizational in origin, most authors argue that they have their roots in the formative experiences of the group and are highly resistant to change²² – what might be called a “first war” syndrome.

If culture explains learning performance, then we should expect to see substantial variation in initial response, intrawar adaptation, and interwar retention. Particular national traditions or organizations should consistently outperform others in terms of

²¹ James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy What Government Bureaucracies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), pp. 93.

²² Philip Selznick, *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 38.

initial response, intrawar adaptation and interwar retention. In addition, such variation should be clearly linked to the historical anchors that culture proponents identify.

Cultural arguments suffer from several general weaknesses. First, culture arguments are notoriously underspecified. Culture is often so broad a variable that it can be used to justify almost any observed outcome. The absence of compelling causal mechanisms leaves the category of argument open to ad hoc assignment of causality. Second, the level of analysis is often unclear. In some cases it is national culture that purportedly dictates outcomes;²³ in others a particular organizational culture is the driver. How national and organizational cultures interact, and which is the more significant in explaining behavior remains maddeningly opaque. Third, many cultural arguments fail the test of time. Cultural traits used to explain outcomes in one historical period often produce the opposite outcomes in subsequent periods.²⁴ John Nagl's explains sub par American performance in Vietnam in terms of the American way of war; a longstanding emphasis on total war and a culture resistant to skeptical inquiry made the U.S army a less effective learning institution. In the wake of his experiences in Iraq, Nagl argues that this same American military has been far more effective in adapting to its current counterinsurgency challenge.²⁵ The same enduring national character and organizational history appear to have produced the opposite outcomes.

²³ Rod Thornton, "Historical Origins of the British Army's Counter-Insurgency and Counter-Terrorist Techniques," Conference Paper, Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), pp. 3-5.

²⁴ This problem extends well beyond the issue areas of counterinsurgency and the military. Culture arguments have often been used to explain cross-national differences in economic performance. Explanations of low economic performance in Confucian cultures in the 1940s and 1950s identified specific traits such as familial organization and a high propensity as obstacles to development. A half century later, those same traits are cited as explanations for meteoric economic growth seen in those same communities over the last three decades.

²⁵ John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. ix.

These methodological issues aside, the cultural argument, with its emphasis on national and organizational traits, does not correspond to the observed pattern of behavior. It is true that groups vary in their response to the same stimulus of counterinsurgency, but not along national and organizational lines. Military reactions to counterinsurgency are remarkably similar. In spite of significant differences in national and organizational histories, militaries appear to respond to counterinsurgency in the same way. This is a major problem for most cultural arguments; if variation in early history and therefore culture explains outcomes, then why do a range of militaries exhibit largely the same behavior in the response to counterinsurgency stimuli? It is not that variation is entirely absent; instead it appears that the variation is professional rather than national or organizational in origin. Across a range of national traditions, civilian politicians appear to approach the problem of counterinsurgency differently than their military counterparts.

The argument presented in this study shares some of the characteristics of the cultural arguments. It places significant emphasis on the role of ideas in shaping behavior. Where it breaks with the cultural arguments is in the origins of those beliefs and their locus. The military operational code is functional in origin and its persistence is the result of its observed and lasting utility in conventional war. And militaries share this implicit set of core beliefs in spite of significant variation in national and organizational history. This study also breaks with the cultural school in terms of specificity. It argues that dysfunctional patterns of behavior have more to do with the interaction of professional beliefs and counterinsurgency stimuli than with broader cultural identities or group histories.

Constraints: Resources and Scruples

The final category of explanation focuses on the role of constraints. According to these arguments, effective counterinsurgency strategies do exist but militaries are unable to employ them.

Resources: More Boots on the Ground

One popular notion is that success in counterinsurgency is primarily a function of resources and specifically manpower. Whatever the strategy, the counterinsurgent force must deploy some minimum number of troops in order to defeat rebellion and restore order. This conviction is usually stated in the form of minimum force ratios: the number of security forces per guerilla,²⁶ the number of forces relative to the size of the population,²⁷ or the number of forces for a given geographical area.

James Quinlivan has provided the leading, contemporary version of this argument. He argues that past historical cases suggest a threshold of 20 security force personnel for every 1,000 inhabitants.²⁸ Above that threshold, counterinsurgency forces may be able to restore order; below the threshold, they have almost no chance of

²⁶ The prescribed force ratio of friendly forces to guerillas varies considerably by author. Colonels Valeriano and Bohannon argue that effective operations demand 40-50 troops for every guerilla, while Edgar O'Ballance argues that the threshold is 10: 1. Larry Cable has cited a number of sources from the Malaya and Vietnam eras that propose force: force ratios between 10 and 12 to 1 (Sources: Colonel Napoleon D. Valeriano, Lieutenant Colonel Charles T.R. Bohannon, *Counterinsurgency Operations: The Philippine Experience* (New York: Praeger, 1962), pp. 22; Edgar O'Ballance, *The Greek Civil War: 1944-1949* (New York: Praeger, 1966), pp. 216; Larry E. Cable, *Conflict of Myths: The Development of American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), pp. 81-82).

²⁷ James T. Quinlivan, "Force Requirements in Stability Operations," *Parameters*, Winter 1995; James Dobbins, John G. McGinn, Keith Crane, Seth G. Jones, Rollie Lal, Andrew Rathmell, Rachel M. Swanger, Anga R. Timilsina, *America's Role in Nation-Building* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2003); John J. McGrath, *Boots on the Ground: Troop Density in Contingency Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006).

²⁸ James Quinlivan, "Force Requirements in Stability Operations," *Parameters*, Winter 1995, pp. 61.

succeeding: “No one has discovered successful stabilization strategies that avoid large troop commitments while trying to bring order to large populations.”²⁹

If, as Quinlivan suggests, a minimum force to population ratio of 20:1,000 is a “necessary but not sufficient”³⁰ condition for stabilization success, then we should expect to see several patterns in the historical data. First, there should be a generally positive statistical relationship between force ratios and campaign success. Second, cases where force ratios exceed the 20:1,000 threshold should be strongly associated with success. Third, there should be no examples of low force ratio success.

Though these ideas have broadly accepted in defense policy circles, the empirical and theoretical support for Quinlivan’s proposition is remarkably weak. Once we move beyond Quinlivan’s initial case set of six, the purported relationship between force ratios and campaign performance disappears: there are a number of high force ratio failures (Vietnam, Algeria, Chechnya, Cyprus) and low ratio successes (El Salvador, Oman). Using any reasonable coding conventions,³¹ the data do not support a strong, statistical relationship between force ratios and campaign success.³² If there is no strong, statistical

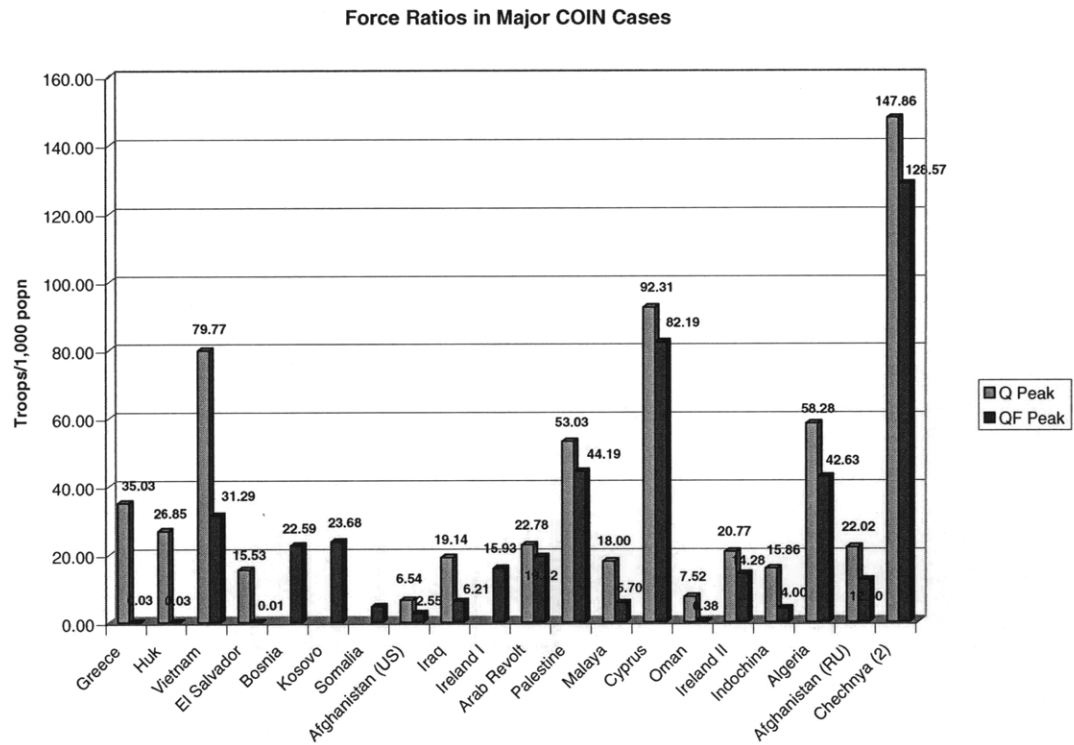
²⁹ James T. Quinlivan, “Burden of Victory: The Painful Arithmetic of Stability Operations,” RAND, 2003.

³⁰ Ibid, Quinlivan, “Force Requirements in Stability Operations,” pp. 61.

³¹ In the chart, the ratio of all security forces (local and foreign) to population corresponds to Q or the blue column. The ratio of foreign troops to population is QF as represented by the red column. Though Quinlivan makes clear that he is referring to Q (total local and foreign security forces), other authors have invoked his 20:1,000 benchmark while counting only foreign troops (James Dobbins, John G. McGinn, Keith Crane, Seth G. Jones, Rollie Lal, Andrew Rathmell, Rachel Swanger, Anga Timilsina, *America’s Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2003), MR-1753).

³² It turns out that there are a number of serious coding problems that make testing of the Quinlivan proposition more challenging than it might at first appear. The inclusion or exclusion of various elements of the security forces (e.g. local self-defense forces) causes the ratios to swing dramatically, dramatically reducing the utility of standardized benchmarks. Similarly, the measurement of the denominator (population) raises important questions (e.g. is the relevant population the total or simply the ethnic or political base associated with the rebellion?). Finally, Quinlivan makes no attempt to define a standard of success. Taken together, these coding problems weaken his narrow claims to validity even within his reduced case set of six. For a more detailed discussion of this problem, see Colin Jackson, “An Arithmetic of Force? The Use and Abuse of Force Ratios in Counter-insurgency.”

correlation between force ratios and success, then it is difficult to argue that a lack of material resources explains failure in counterinsurgency.



When we shift from a focus on the relationship between force ratios and campaign outcomes to the impact of resources on learning, the positive relationship becomes even more suspect. Implicit in the Quinlivan proposition is the idea that strategic choice and resource allocation are casually independent. This study argues that resource availability often drives strategic choice. Provided unlimited manpower and resources, militaries will pursue their preferred strategies and will respond to performance shortfalls through material escalation. The cases examined here, and a number of cases outside the study, suggest that resource scarcity stimulates early and far ranging search. Abundance, by contrast, delays search and indulges damaging first preferences.

Scruples: The Balance of Terror

According to some authors, the key to successful counterinsurgency is to exert more coercive force over the population than the insurgents. When modern sensibilities intervene, Western powers are unable to do the unseemly things necessary to achieve their objective of crushing resistance. In a recent essay, Edward Luttwak explained the dilemma in these terms:

Occupiers can thus be successful without need of any counterinsurgency methods or tactics if they are willing to out-terrorize the insurgents, so that fear of their reprisals outweighs either the desire to help the insurgents, if any, or their own threats.³³

As Gil Merom has noted, liberal, democratic polities are often incapable of or unwilling to compete in this arena. While governments and militaries may be willing to do what is necessary in the short run, increased military performance comes at the cost of diminished domestic support. Eventually, domestic and international outcry so increase the costs of the campaign that it becomes unsustainable.³⁴ Merom goes on to argue that high levels of violence are not only effective but also efficient: “Higher levels of violence can cut down on the investment and loss of manpower and material, both through the destruction involved and the fear generated.”³⁵ While he acknowledges that brutality may encourage resistance, Merom contends that these costs are frequently overstated: “Beyond a certain threshold of coercion, the emboldening effect of brutality may very well be offset by the fear it creates. Oppressed communities may become too fearful to let their feelings of humiliation, insult and vengeance guide their behavior.”³⁶

³³ Edward Luttwak, “Modern War: Counter-Insurgency as Malpractice,” *Politique étrangère*, No. 4 (Winter), 2006, pp. 10.

³⁴ Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Merom, pp. 43.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Merom, pp. 45.

If Merom and Luttwak are correct and the primary obstacle to adaptation in counterinsurgency is the denial of the viable option of state terror, then we should expect to see two things in the historical case set. First, states and militaries that do employ terror should perform better, at least in the local arena. Whatever the domestic or international outcry, such militaries should come closer to a lasting and low cost solution to rebellion. Second, as Merom argues, democracies should be less effective in counterinsurgency because their citizens deny them the use of the most effective strategies.

The critical assumption in these arguments is the efficacy of state violence in counterinsurgency. If we confine ourselves to campaigns of extermination, then Merom is correct. Whether in the classical period, or in the twentieth century campaigns in Turkey, Tibet, or Saddam's Iraq, a state that is willing to destroy a significant fraction of the population and resettle the area with its own supporters may well succeed in breaking resistance. Short of such wars of annihilation, however, collective responsibility strategies and the blunt use of force have seldom been effective in establishing stable, low cost state authority.³⁷ Brutal occupation may succeed in imposing state order at the point of a gun, but when the gun is removed resistance is likely to re-emerge. Far from being the "efficient and economical solution that Merom portrays, high coercion campaigns that stop short of genocide are recipes for high cost, long run stalemate. The brutal, large scale and protracted German occupations of Greece and Yugoslavia did not

³⁷ This is very similar to the distinction between air power strategies predicated on the destruction of men and materiel and those based on the threat of future destruction. There is no question that the wholesale destruction of the population, armed forces and industrial underpinnings may eventually extinguish a state. What is far more problematic is the notion that some more limited form of destruction will lead to the target to concede. The threat of destruction proves far less compelling than the fact. For a more detailed treatment of this dilemma, see Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 55-79.

extinguish resistance behavior. Similarly, Russian brutality in Afghanistan and Chechnya has not restored state authority that can survive the removal of very large numbers of troops. These extreme cases, in which neither resource nor scruples constrain the counterinsurgency forces, cast into doubt the core assumption of the efficacy and economy of state terror.

Instead, it appears that there are two stable equilibrium strategies in counterinsurgency. The first is the strategy of annihilation. Though the material and audience costs may be very high, and success may involve a decades long course of “treatment,” a state that is willing to destroy the enemy population and replace it with loyalists can construct stable, low cost authority over the long run. On the other end of the spectrum, counterinsurgency forces can design an order around the minimal consent of the governed. This Model 3 strategy is generally less costly to build and maintain, and the domestic and international audience costs are considerably lower. The middle course, characterized by state terror that falls short of demographic annihilation, is a recipe for failure.

Sui Generis: The Denial of General Patterns

Faced with the complexity of internal war and the weak explanatory power of theories based on experience, ideas, and constraints, other authors have taken refuge in the *sui generis* argument. According to this argument, each case of counterinsurgency is essentially unique, and any internally valid explanations of outcomes cannot be safely exported to other cases. Interstate war, which pits two functionally similar actors against one another in a trial of strength, is considerably simpler than internal war. In internal

war, the opposing armed forces must compete with a number of functionally distinct actors with widely divergent goals and capabilities: multiple armed groups, organized political factions, and the population. The structural complexity of internal war makes the problem of generalization considerably more challenging than in interstate war.

While internal war is often far more complex and variable than interstate war, this denial of general patterns appears overdrawn. The *sui generis* objection could be applied to virtually any category of complex social activity - from civil war to revolution.³⁸ If internal wars were unique, then we would expect to see tremendous variation in the behavior of the antagonists and the efficacy of their strategies. Instead, what is striking about counterinsurgency is the obvious and stable patterns of behavior across historical cases. While each case has its particular features, the forces bearing on the counterinsurgency authorities, the population and the insurgents are remarkably consistent. To seize on the particular features of each case and deny recognizable patterns would be to forgo an opportunity to make progress towards a more complete understanding of a recurrent and important phenomenon.

Nor is the *sui generis* approach costless. As in any single case study, narrow focus increases the risk of spurious inference. The author can attribute causal weight to a particular feature in the case, but cannot establish with any certainty whether that feature explains the observed outcome. The comparison of different cases is an indirect way of

³⁸ Here Raymond Aron's quip seems appropriate: "Historical understanding consists of perceiving differences among similar phenomena and similarities among different ones." (Source: Raymond Aron, "Evidence and Inference in History," in David Lerner (ed.), *Evidence and Inference* (Glencoe: 1959), pp. 27).

discriminating between internally valid and invalid explanations for particular, historical outcomes.³⁹

In the counterinsurgency literature, the most common expression of the *sui generis* critique is the “great man” argument. In every counterinsurgency campaign, success or failure in learning depends on the skill and vision of the senior leaders. When states are fortunate enough to have the leadership of a General Templer,⁴⁰ they succeed; when genius is absent and they must make due with a General Westmorland, they are more likely to fail. Since chance plays a prominent role in the appointment of such leaders, learning performance in counterinsurgency is something of a random lottery: who you get determines how you do.

If the presence of genius in senior leadership is a leading explanation of organizational learning performance in counterinsurgency, then several things should be true. First, changes in leadership should produce major changes in interpretation. Since counterinsurgency campaigns tend to be protracted, each case offers an opportunity to test the effects of leadership replacement on senior leadership and organizational behavior. Second, senior leaders should be able to impose their interpretations on their organizations.

In practice, neither assertion is strongly supported. While leadership changes provide an opportunity for changes in strategy, they often reveal the relative similarity or homogeneity of the population from which leaders are chosen. Most candidates for

³⁹ Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inquiry in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 209-211.

⁴⁰ General Templer was the military and civilian governor in British Malaya during the peak years of the Malayan insurgency. Many credit Templer with reviving the collapsing British campaign in Malaya and setting the stage for eventual victory several years later. For a more detailed discussion of Templer's contribution, see Chapter 7.

senior leadership are products of professional education, socialization, selection and self-selection; not surprisingly, they are more likely to confirm existing organizational beliefs than overturn them. While maverick leaders do exist, they are rarer than a truly random sample would suggest.

What is more, the influence of even the most senior military leaders depends on the content of their proposed reforms. When senior leaders propose changes that are consistent with the beliefs and preferences of the military organization, then change can be rapid and sweeping. When changes require major conceptual shifts or jeopardize the institutional interests of the military, the power of the visionary leader may be limited and reversible. Bureaucratic inertia is not a constant; it varies with the relationship between the proposed changes and the prior beliefs and preferences of the organization.

Summary

Militaries fail to learn from counterinsurgency because they misunderstand it. They misunderstand it not in a trivial or accidental way but in a crippling, systematic and predictable one. Closely held professional beliefs so distort military reactions to rebellion that they follow a clear pattern: inappropriate response, delayed search, errant choice. This dysfunctional pattern is not particular to any national tradition. All professional militaries, irrespective of their past experience, appear to labor under the same conceptual disadvantages.

As militaries engaged in counterinsurgency come to understand what is necessary to succeed, they come to despise the solution set. The organizational changes that maximize the chances of task success impinge on the authority, resources and prestige of

the military institution. While militaries may be willing to put up with unpalatable changes under wartime pressure, the end of the campaign often sets off a vigorous organizational backlash. Distasteful arrangements, no matter how effective they proved in the preceding conflict, are jettisoned as the military returns to its preferred task orientation. Peacetime, far from being a sanctuary for the measured refinement and development of counterinsurgency doctrine, becomes the rendering house of proven counterinsurgency strategies.

Task pressure acts as the switching mechanism between these two sets of influences. When war threatens the survival of the state and its instruments, the pressure to overcome the opponent overwhelms the influence of parochial concerns is minimal. Militaries engaged in total counterinsurgency may struggle to understand the conflict, but they seldom subordinate problem solving to institutional self-protection. When counterinsurgency does not threaten the state, cognitive and motivated biases are both present. The former distorts response, evaluation and search; the latter delays and distorts the search for alternative strategies. In times of peace, the disappearance of task pressure makes parochial interests dominant.

Chapter 2

Militaries, Organizational Change, and Counterinsurgency

This study of organizational adaptation in counterinsurgency is motivated by two empirical puzzles. First, why do militaries have such difficulty improving task performance over the course of counterinsurgency campaigns? The history of counterinsurgency reveals a striking pattern of flawed initial response, biased adaptation, and delayed search for more effective strategies. Second, why do militaries have such difficulty improving their performance across successive counterinsurgency campaigns? Even when militaries manage to develop important new routines and strategies over the course of a single counterinsurgency campaign, they tend to abandon these lessons in relatively short order. Having discarded these lessons, militaries are likely to start subsequent counterinsurgency campaigns with the same inappropriate strategies.

Central Questions

In contrast to much of the recent scholarship on learning in counterinsurgency,⁴¹ this study focuses on the content of organizational learning rather than the formal structures or process of learning. It contends that almost all militaries undergo substantial organizational change over the course of counterinsurgency campaigns, but that this experience is ambiguous and subject to organizational interpretation. The real questions are what militaries learn from their exposure to counterinsurgency, what they do not learn, and why. We are particularly interested in whether the lessons militaries derive

⁴¹ John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Westport: Praeger, 2002); Robert Cassidy, *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror: Military Culture and Irregular Warfare* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008); Major General Robert H. Scales, "The Second Learning Revolution," *Military Review* (January-February 2006), pp. 37-44.

from these experiences improve task performance. In other words, do the changes in military strategy within and across counterinsurgency campaigns make the re-establishment of stable, self-standing political order in the affected regions more likely?

The Dominant Pattern: Intra-war Pitfalls and Inter-war Purges

The history of modern counterinsurgency reveals striking regularities in the pattern of military responses to this category of problem. The lessons that professional militaries derive from these campaigns are quite similar across national traditions and across time. The themes that emerge suggest that the problems militaries encounter in these conflicts are professional rather than national in origin.

During counterinsurgency campaigns, professional militaries are most successful in exploiting existing strategies and routines. They refine existing tools and concepts, and these efforts translate into improved efficiency at the level of the organizational routine. Professional militaries engaged in counterinsurgency generally become far more proficient in counter-guerilla warfare; their efforts to seek out and destroy insurgents follow a distinct learning curve. Where old tool sets are inadequate, militaries often develop new tools and routines designed to fill these gaps. Militaries often develop new capabilities in the areas of civic action, psychological operations, and human intelligence – all capabilities whose significance in conventional war is quite limited.

Where militaries struggle and often fail at the level of campaign strategy: the effort to combine existing and new routines to produce the desired political outcomes. The surface similarity of counterinsurgency to conventional war produces an illusion of familiarity. This illusion in turn leads militaries to apply conventional military strategies.

Faced with small groups of armed opponents, militaries will seek to re-establish order by destroying these groups in battle. Overly optimistic interpretation of performance feedback from these military operations reinforces attachment to the conventional military response to insurgency. When militaries belatedly realize that conventional strategies produce stalemate at the campaign level, they attempt to modify existing strategies rather than overthrow them. The military moves from the simple application of force to the application of a mix of force and positive material and ideational incentives. While this shift is more effective than a purely military response, these modified strategies seldom provide a lasting answer to the underlying problems of political instability and high levels of social violence. The energies consumed in the modification of the military model to incorporate non-military tools

When counterinsurgency campaigns end, militaries retain certain lessons and purge others. This selective retention favors tools and capabilities that are consistent with the organization's dominant logic and bureaucratic interests. When militaries recognize what the adoption of the counterinsurgency solution set means in bureaucratic terms, they reject it. Militaries are least likely to retain the core strategic lessons of counterinsurgency – those that relate the exercise of force to the restoration of state authority. Instead of weighing strategies on the basis of their proven utility in addressing the problems of counterinsurgency, militaries judge them on the basis of compatibility with existing beliefs and institutional interests. Consequently, professional militaries are likely to enter subsequent counterinsurgency campaigns with the same suboptimal and often counter-productive strategies that proved unsuccessful in earlier campaigns.

What explains learning dysfunction in Counterinsurgency?

This study provides an explanation in two parts. First, the causal and normative beliefs models that professional militaries bring to counterinsurgency exert a profound influence on their initial responses and subsequent adaptation. Those beliefs, which I refer to as their operational code, account for much of the bias and delay in the typical adaptive response. Professional militaries will tend to pursue offensive operations in the expectation that the military defeat of its armed opponents will lead to a cessation of hostilities. Their battlefield successes tend to reinforce their commitment to this strategy and delay the search for more effective strategies. Even as the inadequacy of conventional military approaches becomes apparent, the implicit causal and normative beliefs of the professional military distort the search for new strategies. Instead of recasting the conflict as a political problem, militaries try to modify their existing mental models to incorporate new political elements.

Second, organizational incentives play a supporting role in explaining biased intrawar adaptation and a dominant role in explaining selective interwar retention. Militaries resist the adoption and retention of the counterinsurgency “best practices” set because it undermines the organizations’ fundamental interests in survival, autonomy, resources, and prestige. A strategic solution set that depends on unilateral military restraint and increased risk to organization members is unlikely to appeal to military leaders. Similarly, organizational arrangements that give civilians veto power over the operational use of military force challenge the military’s claim to a separate sphere of

expertise and control.⁴² Furthermore, effective counterinsurgency strategies may represent long term drains on the resources and prestige of the military organization. In wartime, such compromises may be grudgingly accepted, though only after more palatable approaches have been exhausted. Once wartime pressure is gone, the military organization will jettison those lessons that threaten both its core ideas and interests.

The relative influence of ideas and organizational interests varies with the level of task pressure. When the survival of the army or the state is at stake, the parochial interests of the military organization will tend to recede as task success and organizational survival become synonymous. In peacetime, when task pressure is entirely absent, bureaucratic interests will tend to dominate organizational behavior. When task pressure is moderate, as in the case of most expeditionary counterinsurgency campaigns, the military must balance task pressures and bureaucratic pressures. Routines and strategies which improve task performance and are consistent with core beliefs and organizational interests will receive more attention and resources.⁴³ Where routines and strategies involve clear tradeoffs between task performance and ideas or interests, militaries are likely to exhaust all other avenues before they embrace them. When the stakes are limited and task pressure is low, task performance is important but not all important.

While the military operational code and organizational interests explain many of the difficulties militaries encounter in intrawar and interwar adaptation, they are not dispositive. What militaries manage to learn in counterinsurgency depends on the

⁴² Samuel A. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957); Helmut von Moltke as cited in Daniel A. Hughes (ed.), *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), pp. 35-36.

⁴³ Peter A. Hall, "The Politics of Keynesian Ideas" in Peter A. Hall (ed.), *The Political Power of Economic Ideas: Keynesianism Across Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 361-391.

influence of a handful of independent variables. It is the interaction of these variables with the twin pressures of ideas and beliefs that explains the outcome of organizational learning in counterinsurgency.

Misunderstanding Counterinsurgency – The Military Operational Code

Bounded rationality, Cognitive simplification, and the Operational Code

Organizations and individuals have powerful incentives to simplify their interaction with the environment. Decision makers generally lack the time, resources, and cognitive capability to examine and weigh all of the information relevant to a given choice. As a result, they employ shortcuts to guide their search for appropriate responses.⁴⁴ These simplifications are generally positive – they enable the organization to reduce the cost and time necessary to interpret feedback and respond to changes. A relatively stable, information structure of the environment makes it possible for the organization to employ a selective rather than exhaustive approach to problem solving; instead of examining every detail of the landscape, the organization can afford to look at a handful of proven indicators to select an appropriate response.⁴⁵

Cognitive simplification takes place on two levels: routines and operational codes. Organizational routines are standard responses to specific problems that the organization

⁴⁴ Herbert Simon, “A behavioral model of rational choice,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Volume 69, No. 1 (February 1955), pp. 99- 118; James G. March, Herbert A. Simon, *Organizations* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1958), pp. 136-172 . For a more general discussion of the role of heuristics or shortcuts see Deborah Welch Larson, *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 50-57; Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 24-32; Ziva Kunda, *Social Cognition: Making Sense of People* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), pp. 36-40.

⁴⁵ Gerd Gigerenzer, Peter M. Todd, ABC Research Group, *Simple Heuristics that make us Smart* (Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 13.

has faced in the past.⁴⁶ As the environment changes, whether in competitive or technological terms, specific routines may be refined or discarded. While these routines are important to understanding any snapshot of an organization's behavior, they are expression by a more general set of shared causal and normative beliefs – the organization's operational code.⁴⁷ The operational code plays three important roles. First, the code helps the organization prioritize activities and evaluate performance feedback; members of a given organization or profession will share a rough understanding of what is central to their business and what is peripheral. Second, the operational code includes a basic causal logic or mental model for routine functions. This causal logic provides rough rules of cause and effect in standard situations, and a handful of core measures of performance or effectiveness. This causal logic is distinct from the routines or standard operating procedures (SOPs) it employs. The operational code is the broader logical framework that drives the choice and retention of specific routines or SOPs.⁴⁸ Third, the operational code may contain important normative beliefs; it may specify what members of an organization should and should not do in the practice of their trade. Together, these beliefs define the limits of the profession's area of interest. Though the operational code does not dictate all actions or all organizational routines, it

⁴⁶ Richard R. Nelson, Sidney G. Winter, *An Evolutionary Theory of Economic Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 14-19; *ibid.*, March, Simon, *Organizations*, pp. 140.

⁴⁷ Nathan Leites coined the term "operational code" in his study of Bolshevik reasoning, *The Operational Code of the Politburo: A Systematic Analysis of the Political Strategy of Communism and the Rules by which it Operates* (New York: The RAND Corporation, 1951). Alexander George refined Leites' approach, specifying the content and influence of Communist ideology on Soviet behavior (Alexander George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (June 1969)). The use of the term operational code is also broadly similar to work by Richard Bettis C.K. Prahalad on what they call "the dominant logic" of organizations (C.K. Prahalad, Richard Bettis, "The Dominant Logic: A new linkage between diversity and performance," *Strategic Management Journal*, 1986, Volume 7, pp. 485-501.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, George, pp. 191, 196-197.

shapes the actions and policies of organizations in predictable ways.⁴⁹ This is particularly true when the organization is engaged in a search for solutions to novel problems. The code's logic narrows the set of routines or solutions that appeal to an organization confronted with a specific problem. Solutions that do not conform to the operational code are less likely to be examined, adopted or retained.⁵⁰

The operational code is functional in origin, and the locus of the code will depend on the range of organizations that share a given function. In some cases, an operational code may be specific to a single organization. In other industries or issue areas, similar functions may lead to the development of broadly similar or even shared organizational or professional codes.

This operational code is specific to an organization or profession but general to its members. The basic elements are instilled in professional training and reinforced by experience and social interaction with other members of the profession. It is the strong shared nature of this professional logic that enables professionals (e.g. German and American medical doctors) to communicate and cooperate even when separated by national, linguistic, or historical barriers. The differences in logic across professions explains the predictable differences in the members' approaches to problems that lie outside of their area of expertise; members of the medical profession will approach problem solving in a way that is distinct from that taken by lawyers or soldiers.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., George, pp. 191, 196.

⁵⁰ This is also closely related to Thomas Kuhn's notion of paradigms and paradigm shifts (Source: Thomas A. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)).

⁵¹ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 286.

The utility of these simplifications depends on the fit between these simplifications and the problems the organization encounters.⁵² If organizations apply the appropriate routine or decision rule, then the organization is likely to solve the problem and reduce the time and cost of response. If the chosen routine does not match the problem, then the test becomes one of flexibility rather than fit: can the organization detect the mismatch and develop a more appropriate response? The answer to this question depends less on the structure of specific routines than on the operational code that underpins them.

In short, constraints and the structure of the environment make it both necessary and feasible to take shortcuts in problem solving. While these shortcuts are generally positive, they open the door to interpretive failure.

The Military Operational Code

Professional militaries share an operational code, and this code has exerted a powerful influence over time and across varied strategic settings on the more observable elements of doctrine and strategy. The unifying theme in this operational code is coercion. Military leaders are, as Laswell and later Huntington noted, “managers of violence;” their core function is the use of force to compel the submission of their enemies. What is most important to the managers of violence is battle. Carl von

⁵² Laura Martignon, Ulrich Hoffrage, “Why does one-reason Decision Making Work?” in *ibid.*, Gigerenzer, pp. 129-136; Kenneth R. Hammond, *Human Judgment and Social Policy: Irreducible Uncertainty, Inevitable Error, Unavoidable Injustice* (Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 9, 103-105.

Clausewitz, the most important exponent of the modern operational code, summarized the military art in this way:⁵³

“Fighting is the central military act; all other activities merely support it....Engagements mean fighting. The object of fighting is the destruction of defeat of the enemy. The enemy in the individual engagement is simply the opposing fighting force.”⁵⁴

Strategy, according to Clausewitz, “is the use of an engagement for the purpose of the war.”⁵⁵ The way to achieve victory is to mass force and destroy the enemy’s armed force in decisive battle.⁵⁶ The immediate measure of effectiveness is the destruction of the enemy or the capture of his capital.⁵⁷ Should the attacker fail to destroy his enemy or compel his submission, the natural response is to increase the level of force applied to the problem.⁵⁸

The assumptions that underpin this mental model are important. First, the model is predicated on a simple and stable information structure in which the enemy army is the focus and all other objects in the battle space are secondary. Second, it assumes that problem solving depends on the one-way application of force to compel submission. It assumes that the physical destruction of the enemy’s armed forces will lead enemy leaders to capitulate. Third, the model minimizes the role of the local population. The central issue is the clash of armies and civilians are treated as insignificant and largely passive bystanders.

⁵³ The Clausewitz depicted here is the Clausewitz of the military profession and not the Clausewitz of social science. Whereas many scholars associate Clausewitz with the notion of the subordination of war to politics, most military professionals have been suspicious of this argument; Clausewitz’s insistence on this point fundamentally challenges the officer corps’ monopoly on wartime decision making. For a discussion of this split interpretation, Michael Howard, “The Influence of Clausewitz,” in Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 31-32.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Clausewitz, pp. 227.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Clausewitz, pp. 177.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Clausewitz, pp. 227.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Clausewitz, pp. 227.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Clausewitz, pp. 77.

The operational code also includes important norms governing the conduct of civilized war. Civilized wars are formal rituals in which statesmen inaugurate conflict, generals decide it through battle, and the defeated acknowledge the outcome in formal surrender.⁵⁹ These wars must involve a strict separation of combatants and non-combatants. The willingness of the military to exercise restraint towards civilians is contingent on the behavior of the enemy and the population; if the enemy or the population blurs the distinction between soldiers and civilians, the military reserves the right to treat the enemy population as combatants. In general, the operational code suggests that adherence to these norms is contingent and reciprocal.

Origins of the Military Operational Code

Military organizations are products of their standard environment, and the peculiarities of that environment have influenced both their reliance on the operational code and its particular content. The specific pressures of the combat environment - high uncertainty, time pressure, background noise, strategic uncertainty, and high consequences of failure – lead military organizations to adopt decision making strategies that favor reliability and speed over accuracy or environmental fit.

The military organization's primary solution to the problems of the combat environment is routinization. A combination of simple routines and decision rules helps the organization overcome obstacles to the execution of its own plans – friction - and the pervasive uncertainty of the battlefield – the fog of war. Routines and rules help commanders ensure that tasks are reliably performed by subordinate units, and provide a basis for action in the face of uncertainty. Military training and internal selection systems

⁵⁹ Helmut von Moltke as cited in *ibid.* Hughes, pp. 44-47.

reflect the importance placed on routines and rules. The object of training is indoctrination – the transmission of known solutions and accepted rules or principles. Job performance at most levels is a function of the military leader's ability to execute routines and apply basic rules under the stress of real or simulated combat.

The effectiveness of this system and the wisdom of the tradeoffs it entails depend on the level of variability in the environment. When tasks are familiar, adaptation is straightforward. So long as the signals are familiar, and the meanings of those signals remain the same, militaries are likely to learn rapidly and effectively.⁶⁰ Under these conditions, the organization's reaction is broadly consistent with the ideal model and performance feedback makes rapid changes in routines and even strategy possible.⁶¹ When the task is clearly novel, the need to adapt is inescapable. If the task clearly falls outside of the framework of the operational code, then the military organization will begin the search for new solutions early. While early search cannot guarantee success, it makes inappropriate patterned response much less likely. The military organization is most likely to stumble when the task appears familiar but is not. Familiar cues will elicit

⁶⁰ Jesper Sørensen has made the point that organizations with strong cultural cohesiveness outperform less cohesive organizations provided that the environment is relatively stable; under these permissive conditions, broad internal agreement on routines and rules brings improved coordination, improved agreement on goals and increased employee effort. In the face of discontinuous change, however, this capability becomes a disability. The same organizations find it hard to recognize the need for change. First order learning impedes and substitutes for second order or strategic learning. Cultural homogeneity reduces internal variety and with it the likelihood that alternative viewpoints are available. Finally, culturally coherent organizations typically lack alternative subcultures (Source: Jesper B. Sørensen, "The Strength of Corporate Culture and the Reliability of Firm Performance," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 47 (2002), pp. 70-91).

⁶¹ When changes remain within the scope of the operational code, even major technical or tactical surprises or setbacks can be recognized and overcome. As Rosen has noted in his study of wartime innovation, the degree of difficulty rises sharply when change invalidates existing measures of effectiveness. Under these circumstances, militaries lack the means to judge their own performance and the soundness of alternative strategies (Source: Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 114).

patterned responses, and those responses may reinforce the organization's commitment to a mistaken course of action.

The Military Operational Code, Doctrine and Strategy

The military operational code is the product of accumulated experience and selective pressure. The beliefs derived from this experience have been tested across a range of cases and express the underlying and enduring regularities of interstate war. Most important, they have proved remarkably insensitive to major changes in the technology of war. This is why these "principles of war" provide an equally compelling explanatory framework for the campaigns of Alexander and the mechanized wars of the 20th century.

This historically stable set of causal beliefs is expressed in doctrine – a given military's concept of how wars should be fought in a given historical moment in time. While the operational code is stable and largely unchanging, doctrine is intrinsically variable; it is a function of this operational code, geographical circumstances, likely adversaries and the state of contemporary technology.⁶² As technology changes, so too may a state's doctrine. States in the same technological moment but different geographical settings will adopt different doctrines. In short, the military operational code is remarkably stable across time and geography.

While doctrine is one state's prewar theory of how wars should be fought,⁶³ strategy is the state's answer to a specific, present challenge. Strategy is the state's plan to accomplish a set of specified ends against a real opponent. In some instances, doctrine

⁶² Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 14.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Posen, pp. 7, 13.

and strategy may be closely related. If the state is particularly astute in guessing the nature of future war or its likely opponent, strategy, at least in the early stages of a war, may be a straightforward projection of the doctrinal theory of war onto a real problem. In other cases, the imagined war of doctrine may be only distantly related to the present challenge. In other cases, doctrinal theories may not correspond to the realities of contemporary technology and a live opponent. In these cases, strategy will be a function of the operational code and the circumstances of the immediate challenge: a plan composed of one part deep causal belief and one part expedient.⁶⁴

In short, the operational code is a function of the information structure of interstate war. Doctrine is a function of the operational code, technology, geographical circumstance and expected opponents. Strategy is a function of the doctrine and a real and present opponent. When doctrine fails to provide effective answers to a real challenge, strategy will be a function of the operational code and expedients.

The operational code does not dictate individual choice. Instead it describes the median performance of the military organization. Every military will produce individuals who resist the illusion of familiarity and develop Model 2 or Model 3 alternatives. What the military operational code does explain is the distribution of those individuals within the larger pool. Model 1 advocates are likely to be the dominant group, followed by a much smaller group of Model 2 innovators. Model 3 advocates are by far the smallest group. This distribution is likely to be even more skewed in the senior ranks, where selection and self-selection have removed heterodox individuals. This means that those

⁶⁴ This is very close to Helmut von Moltke's conception of strategy: "Strategy is a system of expedients. It is more than a discipline, it is the transfer of knowledge to practical life, the continued development of the original leading thought in accordance with constantly changing circumstances. It is the art of acting under the pressure of the most difficult conditions." (Source: Helmut von Moltke as cited in Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War*, pp. 47.

in high command are likely to lean in the direction of Model 1. What is more, each change in senior command is far more likely to produce a Model 1 advocate than a Model 3 visionary.

Standard Military Environments and Military Routinization

Military organizations depend on routines and decision rules because they provide an effective answer to the perennial challenges of combat – uncertainty and friction. Routines and decision rules enable leaders to act quickly and decisively in the absence of complete information. Military leaders will tend to favor reliability under combat conditions over the fit or precision of a given response. In part this rests on the assumption that swift action will clarify the situation;⁶⁵ an organization that can correctly interpret performance feedback can recognize and overcome initial missteps. On a more basic level, it reflects an assumption that delay is more dangerous than hasty action. The optimal general solution to the decision environment of combat is one that emphasizes speed and reliability over evaluation and fit.

Information Structure and the Utility of Environmental Cues

Cognitive simplification works when the short cuts employed fit the task environment. As Herbert Simon⁶⁶ and others⁶⁷ have noted, every environment has a specific information structure and adaptation will depend heavily on that structure. The

⁶⁵ Militaries have long considered the hasty attack an effective way to capture information about the enemy's strength and disposition (Source: Adolf von Schell, *Battle Leadership: Some Personal Experiences of a Junior Officer of the German Army with Observations on Battle Tactics and the Psychological Reactions of Troops in Campaign* (Quantico: The Marine Corps Association, 1988), pp. 71-72). For a contemporary example of this reasoning, see Major-General Raymond T. Odierno, "Division Operations across the Spectrum – Combat to SOSO in Iraq" *Field Artillery* (March-June 2004), pp. 9-11.

⁶⁶ Herbert Simon, "Rational Choice and the Structure of the Environment," *Psychological Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2, 1956, pp. 130.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Gigerenzer, Todd, pp. 13.

way in which information is distributed in the environment, the degree of randomness versus structure, and the types of signals or cues that are present define that information structure. The regularity and stability of the information structure are what make the use of routines and heuristics possible and productive.

In any environment, some cues or signals are more useful than others. Some cues are consistently valid guides to action, while others are less useful. A businessman faced with a choice between two investments will rely on a cue such as estimated profitability⁶⁸ that has proven an effective guide in the past. This past validity of the profit signal enables the businessman to dispense with an exhaustive evaluation of the remaining information about the two projects. This property, which Gigerenzer and Todd have labeled “ecological validity,” can be operationalized as the number of correct predictions an actor will make using this cue or rule divided by the total number of predictions.⁶⁹ In this case, the businessman may have found that investments with a higher net present value resulted in better business outcomes in nine out of ten cases: an ecological validity of 0.9. The validity is “ecological” in the sense that it is specific to an environment. The validity of the same measure used in a different environment might be quite different.

Some cues may be ecologically valid but be of little use in discriminating between competing courses of action or competing interpretations of performance. To use another business example, a company that has been approached by multiple potential buyers may receive a number of bids whose total dollar values are quite similar. While the seller may be exclusively concerned with the dollar proceeds of the sale, the particular sample of

⁶⁸ This raises the issue of which measure of profitability (e.g. net present value vs. internal rate of return) is most valid, but the general point is that any measure of profit may be a more reliable guide to action than a host of alternative signals.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Gigerenzer, pp. 85.

bids or the dynamics of the bidding process may leave the seller with no clear way to distinguish between competing bids. Dollar value may have been a highly valid measure in the past, but still contribute relatively little to the decision at hand. This is what Gigerenzer and Todd call the discrimination rate: the frequency with which a signal or rule can help the decision maker distinguish between choices.⁷⁰ A signal or decision rule may be highly valid, but relatively rare in the environment. Alternatively, the cue values may be so similar that the decision maker cannot base his decision on them.

These two characteristics – ecological validity and discrimination rate - enable us to describe the functional utility of any cue or signal to the decision maker. As Gigerenzer and Todd point out, the intuition is relatively simple: “The larger the ecological validity of a cue, the better the inferences. The larger the discrimination rate, the more often a cue can be used to make an inference.”⁷¹

Experience in a given environment enables the decision maker to sort valid cues from noise. More important, this experience enables the decision maker to draw appropriate inferences from a small subset of valid cues.⁷² Even in a relatively noisy or cluttered information environment, the existence of historically stable, ecologically valid cues makes the use of routines and simple decision rules a viable alternative to more exhaustive analysis.⁷³

⁷⁰ The formal definition of discrimination rate is more elaborate and less intuitive than that of ecological validity. For the mathematical formula, see Gigerenzer, Todd, pp. 85.

⁷¹ Ibid., 85.

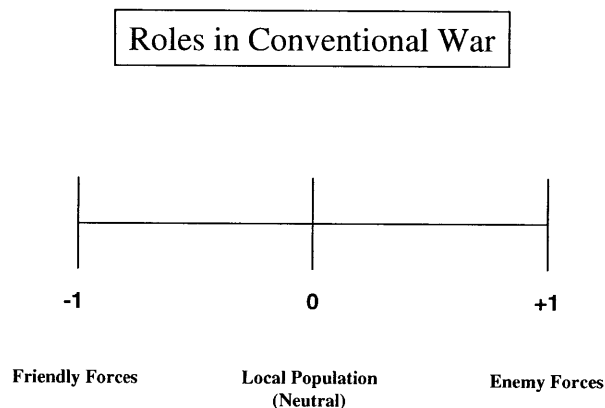
⁷² Jörg Rieskamp, Ulrich Hoffrage, “When Do People Use Simple Heuristics and How Can We Tell?” in *ibid.*, Gigerenzer, Todd, pp. 166.

⁷³ Ibid., Gigerenzer, Todd, pp. 22; John D. Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimension of Political Analysis* (Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 58, 66-70.

The Information Structure of Conventional War

The information structure of conventional war is both simple and historically stable. The military professional can use the known properties of wartime environments to simplify and accelerate the decision making process. The structure and stability of those environments explain the military's high level of commitment to routinization in general and conventional war routines in particular.

In conventional war, humans in a given territory can be divided into three groups: friendly military forces, the population, and enemy forces.



In most instances, the categorization of individuals is straightforward. Uniforms and other conventions help identify combatants, and all other individuals are assumed to be members of the non-combatant population.⁷⁴ The primary focus of attention for each force is its armed opponent. While the civilian population may be treated as a secondary

⁷⁴ This is an obvious oversimplification. Norms and causal rules on the categorization and treatment of non-combatants have varied across cases and across time. Nevertheless, we use this as a simplifying assumption to examine the contrast between the relative simplicity of categorization in conventional war and its far greater complexity in insurgencies.

target under certain circumstances,⁷⁵ civilians are generally assumed to be of secondary importance. In any case, they are assumed to be largely passive, more a part of the physical environment than true actors in the armed struggle.

In this environment, the commander faces at least three perennial problems. First, in a battle with a thinking opponent and mass armies, even perfect ex ante knowledge does not give him an ability to predict outcomes.⁷⁶ In practice, his ex ante knowledge of initial conditions – the location of his enemy, his strength and intentions – is generally quite limited. This condition of pervasive uncertainty is what Clausewitz referred to as the “fog of war.” The second challenge is friction. Clausewitz noted that translating even simple plans into action was immensely hard on the battlefield. The scale of modern military organizations, the stresses of combat, and the role of chance all served to slow and divert the energies of the commander. In addition to fog and friction, the commander faces the severe consequences of failure. The wrong choice, or the right choice made too late, may lead to the destruction of his unit or his own death.

As the commander weighs decisions and evaluates the success or failure of his operations, he can fall back on a handful of core indicators. These cues – enemy losses, friendly losses, and territory gained – together give the commander highly valid measures of the success or failure of an operation. Operations in which the commander kills or captures far larger numbers of his opponents than he loses are clear victories.⁷⁷ Operations which result in the capture of key terrain or rapid advances are likewise

⁷⁵ Militaries target civilians when such action undermines the opponent’s military effort. Sherman’s March to the Sea and the strategic bombing campaigns of WWII are examples of armies targeting civilians in order to break the productive capacity of the enemy.

⁷⁶ This is the Laplacian fallacy – the idea that complete ex ante information would eliminate prospective uncertainty. For further details, see Gigerenzer, Todd, pp. 8-9.

⁷⁷ To use Gigerenzer and Todd’s terminology, loss or exchange ratios have high ecological validity and high discrimination rates.

victories. Operations in which friendly losses are very high, or in which terrain is lost are defeats.

As the commander weighs subsequent resource allocation or organizational changes, these same cues guide his choices. Tactics that produce heavy enemy losses or large territorial gains will be retained, refined, and expanded. Those which score lower on the same measures will receive less attention and fewer resources. Focusing on these cues allows the commander to ignore the far larger set of distracting signals and focus only on those cues that are useful and reliable guides to action.⁷⁸ It is this structural simplicity, hidden beneath the surface chaos of battle, that makes effective command possible.

The information structure of conventional war has proven remarkably stable over much of recorded military history. Loss ratios and territorial gains are as valid in the 21st century as they were in classical combat. It is true that technological changes, and the doctrinal and tactical shifts that have flowed from them, have changed the content of specific routines. Close order infantry drill has no place in modern warfare, having been replaced by new routines that better fit the context of modern war. What has remained intact is the underlying information structure – the parameters of the problem, the most important cues, and the inferences that can be drawn from them. While a 19th century general might be shocked by the technology of 21st century combat, he would find it far easier to interpret the outcomes of conventional battle. It is this stability that gives rise to the belief in enduring principles of war, and gives the work of authors such as Clausewitz remarkable relevance centuries after the tools of their age have been eclipsed.

⁷⁸ Ibid, Steinbruner, pp. 73-74.

The specific attributes and relative stability of the information structure of conventional combat have two important consequences. First, military organizations have come to rely more heavily on routinization than most organizations. So long as the underlying structure of combat has remained simple and stable, routines and simple decision rules have been effective answers to the problems of uncertainty and friction. Second, the specific attributes of this environment have shaped the specific decision rules and mental models that govern military behavior. The tradeoffs and rules of thumb that inform military decision making are direct products of the information structure of combat.

Historical Roots of Military Routinization

This common understanding of the importance of routinization in military operations has deep historical roots. In his early 19th century treatise *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz argued that friction and uncertainty made the use of simple routines unavoidable. Routines reduce friction and make command of large numbers of individuals and units feasible:

“Routine, apart from its sheer inevitability, also contains one positive advantage. Constant practice leads to brisk, precise, and reliable leadership, reducing natural friction and easing the work of the machine. In short, routine will be more frequent and more indispensable the lower the level of action.”⁷⁹

Clausewitz also noted the advantage of using routines to overcome the problem of pervasive uncertainty:

“The frequent application of routine in war will also appear essential and inevitable when we consider how often action is based on pure conjecture or takes place in complete ignorance, either because the enemy prevents us from knowing all the circumstances that might effect our dispositions, or because there is not enough time. Even if we did know all the

⁷⁹ Ibid., Clausewitz, pp. 153.

circumstances, their implications and complexities would not permit us to take the necessary steps to deal with them. Therefore our measures must always be determined by a limited number of possibilities. We have to remember the countless minor factors implicit in every case. The only possible way of dealing with them is to treat each case as implying all the others, and base our dispositions on the general and the probable.”⁸⁰

What Clausewitz suggests is that some level of reliance on routines is inescapable.⁸¹ The complexity of war with a thinking opponent is such that even perfect information cannot provide a reliable guide for action. Instead, the commander must rely on simplified routines and decision rules to act under uncertainty.

While Clausewitz recognized the merits of routines in the execution of a commander’s intent, he was acutely aware of the dangers of routinized behavior in the realm of higher strategy.⁸² He argued that senior commanders must resist the temptation to substitute simple models and principles for careful consideration of larger strategic problems.⁸³ The danger, as he saw it, was that these leaders would come to regard general principles as “absolute, binding frameworks of actions (systems).” Clausewitz argued that the narrow education and socialization of the professional officer corps made the drift toward reflexive action rather than strategic evaluation an ever present danger.⁸⁴ In short, Clausewitz identified the fundamental tension between the benefits of routinized tactics and the dangers of routinized strategy.

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 153.

⁸¹ Max Weber made similar observations about the rise of modern bureaucratic forms. For a detailed treatment of these themes, see Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1947), pp. 363-386.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 153.

⁸³ This explains Clausewitz’s insistence that the most important and far reaching act of judgment is to determine the “nature of the war.” Clausewitz is arguing that hasty patterned response could lead to the application of the wrong strategy.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 154.

Modern Routines and Models

Military reliance on routines and mental models continues into the modern era. While the content of these routines has changed dramatically from the Napoleonic era to the present, the ubiquity and significance of routines and higher order decision rules as building blocks for organizational action under fire has not.

The British Army of the Second World War embraced the use of “battle drills”⁸⁵ as a means of ensuring rapid and effective execution by junior leaders and soldiers. Major General Alexander, one of the chief proponents of the British army’s embrace of battle drill, summarized his commitment to the approach in the following terms:

In the introduction [to the “1st Corps Tactical Notes” pamphlet] Alexander likened battle to a “supreme sport” that required previously worked-out team plays. “Surely,” he argued, “a soldier on the battlefield, beset by fear and doubt, is far more in need of a guide to action than any games player at Lord’s or Wimbledon.” Suggesting that it was preferable “to know instinctively some orthodox line of conduct than ... be paralyzed by... uncertainty of what to do,” he recommended drawing up “lines of conduct – simple guides for simple soldiers” so that men faced with battlefield problems would have answers to them.⁸⁶

For Alexander, as for Clausewitz, routines were an effective means for overcoming friction and uncertainty in mass armies.⁸⁷

Contemporary American war fighting depends on the use of routinization at all levels. Like the British in the Second World War, the U.S. Army employs simple recipes or battle drills to cover reactions to common small unit tactical problems. These drills, and the host of routines collectively labeled “tactics, techniques and procedures” (TTPs), are the building blocks of military action at battalion level and below.

⁸⁵ Jay Luvaas, “Clausewitz, Fuller and Liddell Hart,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 9, Issue 2&3 (June 1986), pp. 197-212.

⁸⁶ John A. English, *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign: A Study of Failure in High Command* (New York: Praeger, 1991), pp. 109.

⁸⁷ The British enthusiasm for battle drill had mixed results. While many insisted that it improved the performance of inexperienced leaders, it also contributed to predictability of British tactics in the face of German opposition. In addition, the Canadian high command appears to have suffered from an upward drift in the habits of routinization.

At the more general level, the U.S. Army has long used decision rules to govern its approach to planning and targeting. One such decision rule, the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) lies at the core of the contemporary military planning process. According to the current Army doctrine, the MDMP provides a universally valid approach to structured problem solving:

*The military decision making process is a planning model that establishes procedures for analyzing a mission, developing, analyzing, and comparing courses of action against criteria of success and each other, selecting the optimum course of action, and producing a plan or order. The MDMP applies across the spectrum of conflict and range of military operations. Commanders with an assigned staff use the MDMP to organize their planning activities, share a common understanding of the mission and commander's intent, and develop effective plans and orders.*⁸⁸

As the figure below shows, the MDMP is an algorithm; the military planner moves through a series of seven steps and 117 substeps, using available information to guide the commander's decision making process. While the MDMP is used by higher level staffs rather than soldiers and junior officers, the motivating rationale behind this routinization is similar to that of the tactical battle drill. Simple, shared models improve and accelerate decision making in the combat environment, giving friendly forces an advantage over the enemy.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ U.S. Army Field Manual 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders Production*, January 2005, pp. 3-1.

⁸⁹ This belief reveals a related assumption that combat is about beating the enemy to the punch. John Boyd's theory of the OODA loop (Observation-Oriented-Decision-Action) is a more refined example of this idea – the notion that success in combat depends on getting inside the enemy's decision cycle.

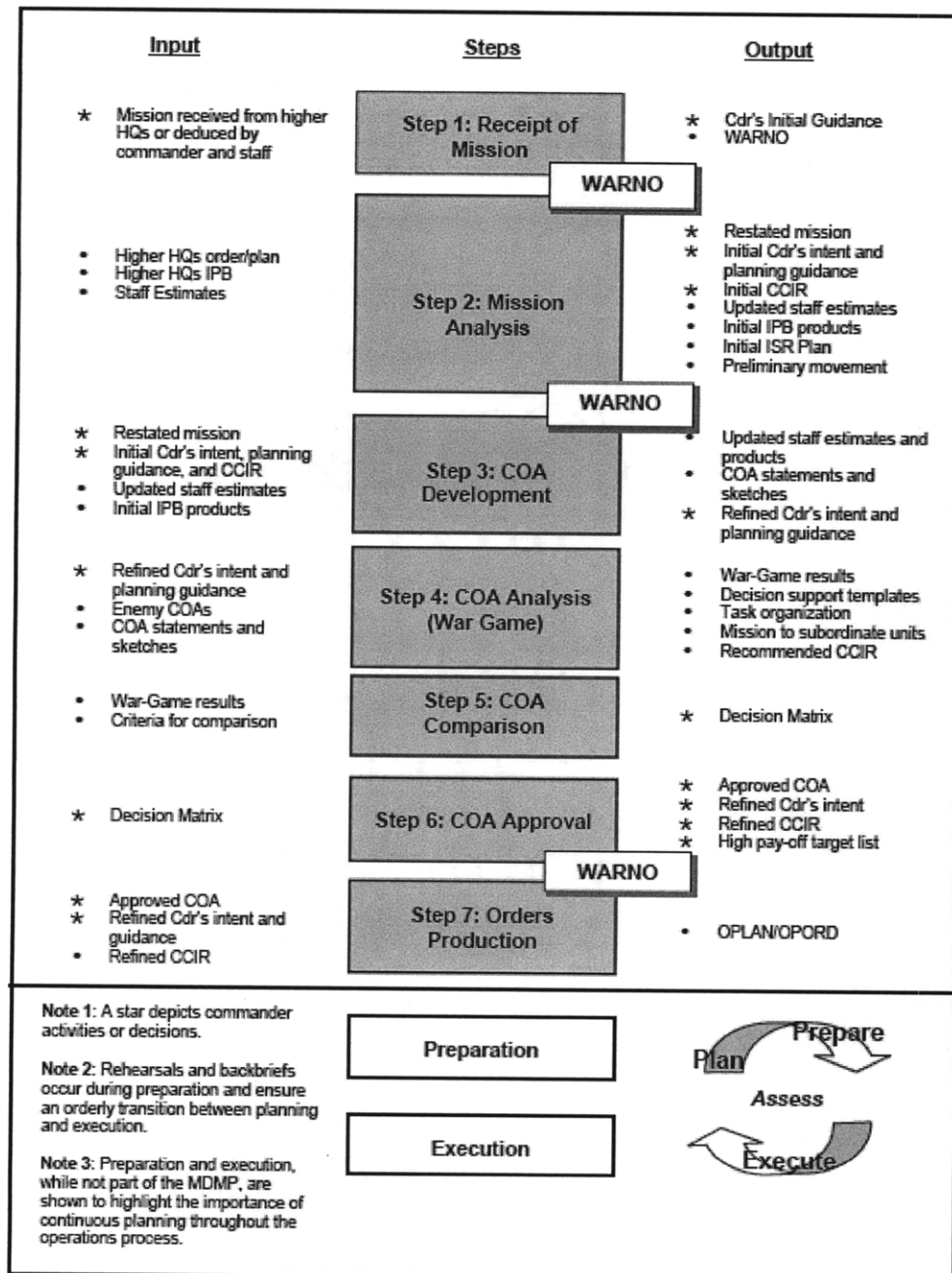


Figure 3-1. The Military Decision Making Process

90

Recent debates about the effectiveness of the MDMP provide supporting evidence of the military's attraction to simplified decision rules. Most critics have attacked the MDMP

⁹⁰ This figure is drawn from U.S. Army Field Manual 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders Production*, January 2005, pp. 3-1.

model on the grounds that it slows down the orders process and diverts attention in unintended ways. The answer, for most critics, is to simplify the algorithm in order to accelerate decision making.

One recent push has been to use recognition-primed models in which the commander's past experience guides the development of military plans and actions.⁹¹ That experience enables the commander to recognize patterns and develop plans that fit the category of problem. The important point is that the debate over MDMP has focused the speed of patterned response not fit; the relative value of one model over another has been seen a function of its contribution to speed and reliability of decision.⁹²

The U.S. military has developed algorithms to routinize the application of firepower against enemy targets. The Army's D³A targeting algorithm⁹³ is illustrated in the figure below. As in the case of the MDMP, the decision model leads decision makers through a cycle of discrete steps. Decision makers analyze decision requirements and generate target lists (decide), locate specific targets (detect), attack those targets (deliver), and evaluate the effects (assess). This cycle runs continuously as the unit seeks to destroy the enemy targets in its sector.

⁹¹ Gary Klein, *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 15-30.

⁹² Christopher Compton, "The Task Force FSO in a Model for Full Spectrum Planning," *Field Artillery* (January-February 2006).

⁹³ The services' targeting rules vary in their particulars, but their basic form and purpose are very similar. The U.S. military's push for joint integration of military operations has resulted in a Joint Targeting Process. For an example of the application of D3A, see Colonel Thomas S. Vandal, Captain William L. Gettig, "D3A in an Urban Environment: 1st Cavalry Counterstrike Operations in Iraq," *Field Artillery Magazine* (September-October 2005), pp. 10-13.

	Operations Process Activity	Targeting Process Activity	Targeting Task
ASSESSMENT	PLANNING	DECIDE	Mission Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform TVA to develop HVTs • Develop targeting guidance and targeting objectives COA Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate potential HPTs • Deconflict and coordinate potential HPTs COA Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop HPTL • Establish TSS • Develop AGM • Determine criteria of success BDA requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orders Production
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize HPTL • Finalize TSS • Finalize AGM • Submit IRs/RFIs to G-2
	PREPARATION EXECUTION	DETECT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Execute ISR plan • Updated PIRs/IRs as they are answered • Update HPTL and AGM
		DELIVER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Execute attacks in accordance with the AGM • Execute information operations tasks
		ASSESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate effects of attacks • Evaluate effects of information operations

Figure H-1. Targeting Process Activities and Tasks

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As in the case of the MDMP, the routinization of targeting is intentional. By simplifying and standardizing the process of attacking targets, the military organization increases the speed and reliability of its actions.

What is generally missing from debates about military decision models is the discussion of the tradeoffs that underpin routinization. The first, identified by Clausewitz and most of the authors of modern military doctrine, is the danger of the routinization of higher strategy. While routines help junior leaders overcome tactical problems of the battlefield, they may come to supplant careful strategic evaluation at the senior level. Routines and decision rules may take on a life of their own, enabling the organization to act without regard to the appropriateness of those actions in a given environment. The

⁹⁴ This figure is drawn from U.S. Army Field Manual 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders Production*, January 2005, pp. H-2.

habits of routinization developed by junior officers seldom fade with promotion, and many senior leaders are as ready to resort to patterned response as their juniors.⁹⁵ The danger is that reflexive and patterned response may not match the specified problem.

A related danger is the problem of tunnel vision. As noted earlier, the use of routines narrows the attention of the organization. Decision makers focus their attention on performance indicators that have worked in the past, and may miss or dismiss unfamiliar signals.⁹⁶ Third, reliance on routines and decision models makes militaries more likely to engage in exploitation than exploration. By employing routines, militaries generate performance feedback that generally stimulates process improvement rather than innovation. Since exploitation and exploration compete for the same organizational resources and attention, a strong bias in favor of exploitation will tend to crowd out exploration, especially in periods of organizational stress and time pressure.⁹⁷

The wisdom of heavy reliance on routines depends on the variability of the environment. Where that environment is relatively stable, routinization may confer tremendous advantages. While we tend to think about warfare as intrinsically unstable, the chaos of battle and the march of technology belie a certain underlying stability in the structure of conventional combat. An early 21st century reading of Clausewitz reveals obvious changes at the level of routines (e.g problems of mountain warfare, 19th century supply trains), but remarkable stability in terms of the general theoretical constructs. In spite of major advances in the information technology and armaments, militaries in the

⁹⁵ Ibid., Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 154.

⁹⁶ Max Bazerman, Dolly Chugh, "Decisions without blinders," *Harvard Business Review*, January 2006; *ibid.*, Steinbrunner, pp. 74.

⁹⁷ James G. March, "Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning," *Organization Science*, Volume 2, Number 1, February 1991, pp. 72-73.

early 21st century struggle with the same basic problems of friction and uncertainty and adopt similar approaches to overcome them.

Reliance on routines is likely to be counterproductive only when change exceeds the range of the organization's decision models.⁹⁸ Under these circumstances, the benefits of routinization are more than offset by the risks of inappropriate response and interpretive failure. Organizations that depend heavily on routines and decision models are less likely to notice and overcome major environmental shifts when they come. Most perilous are the cases in which the situation appears very similar to past problems but is in important respects different. The presence of familiar cues may convince the organization that it understands its performance when in point of fact it does not.

The Military Operational Code and Counterinsurgency

Militaries struggle to develop effective solutions to counterinsurgency not because it is novel but because it appears so similar to problems they fully understand. Inappropriate response, misinterpretation of the performance results, and significant delays in the search for more effective approaches combine to derail military adaptation to the core problems of counterinsurgency.

In many respects counterinsurgency superficially resembles conventional war. In insurgencies, civil order has broken down, and there are armed opponents who prevent the restoration of order. In the presence of familiar cues – widespread violence and armed opponents – the military will tend to apply the mental models, measures of effectiveness and specific routines of conventional war. That familiar cues may have different meanings in the context of counterinsurgencies is seldom examined. Militaries

⁹⁸ Ibid., Steinbrunner, pp. 58

tend to apply their mental models and act on the results.⁹⁹ If the task were entirely novel, and these familiar cues were absent, the temptation to apply existing mental models would be far lower. In this case, the illusion of familiarity is most significant obstacle to learning.

Military domination of counterinsurgencies strategy makes systematic misunderstanding of the task more likely and more intractable. While there are a number of valid reasons that civilian leaders call on the military to lead the counterinsurgency campaign, this abdication of executive control removes an important check on inappropriate, patterned response. Military models and come to dominate the formulation of strategy and the interpretation of state performance, and this makes it more difficult to avoid or overcome learning traps.

The Information Structure of Counterinsurgency

Military organizations enter counterinsurgency with mental models optimized for the conduct of conventional war. These models assume a simple categorization of combatants and non-combatants and a straightforward, one way application of force as the primary path to victory. The presence of familiar cues – armed opponents, civil disorder, and the breakdown of civil authority – suggests that counterinsurgency is a smaller and less intense version of conventional war. Consequently, military leaders will tend to apply inappropriate models, draw incorrect inferences from familiar signals, and ignore more valid but less familiar indicators of campaign progress.

⁹⁹ Militaries might be more likely to succeed if they were entirely unfamiliar with the problem. Military successes in activities such as disaster relief, military aid to civil programs (the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Manhattan project) suggest an ability to overcome new problems once they are recognized as genuinely novel.

The surface similarities between counterinsurgency and conventional war belie important structural differences. Counterinsurgency is intrinsically more complex, involving larger numbers of actors and important differences in the role and significance of the population.

Roger Petersen's model of insurgency provides a useful backdrop on which to examine these effects in depth.¹⁰⁰ According to Petersen, the local population falls along a spectrum ranging from armed support for the insurgents (+3) to armed collaboration with government forces (-3) (see diagram below). To bolster the resistance, insurgent movements must retain those members who are supporting the insurgency in various capacities (+1, +2, +3), attract new adherents from the neutral or pro-government elements of the population (0, -1, -2, -3), and prevent defections to the government cause. The government forces face the opposite challenge: they must physically eliminate the armed insurgents (+3) and their supporters (+2) or force them to abandon the insurgent cause and move into support of the government. Equally important, the government must limit the flow of new recruits into the insurgent movement.¹⁰¹

Individual Roles during
Rebellion
(Petersen, 2001)



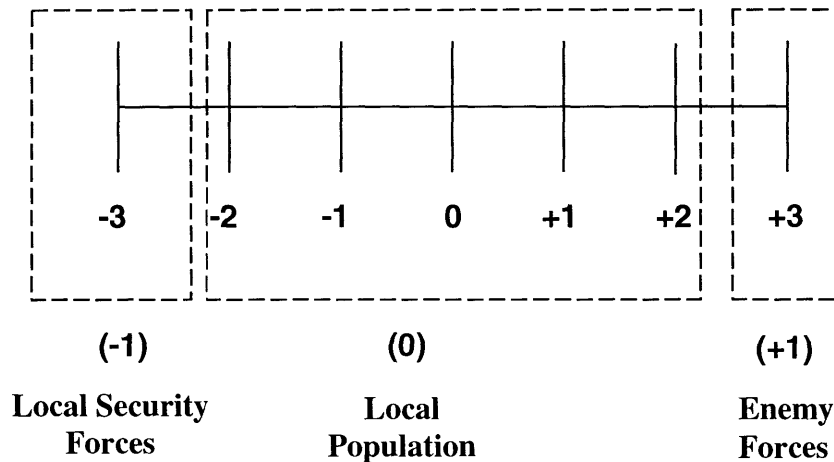
¹⁰⁰ Roger Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 8-10.

¹⁰¹ Petersen's study examines local variation in resistance while holding Soviet counterinsurgency strategy constant; he is interested in the mechanisms that lead certain communities to join the resistance and

A military organization accustomed to dividing the battle space into three categories – friendly (-1), enemy (+1) and neutral (0) - and focusing its efforts on armed opponents will tend to miss the significance of these structural differences in the early stages of the conflict. Military leaders will focus on armed opponents (+3), ignore important enemy infrastructure and support networks (+1, +2), and lump the population into one broad category (-2, -1, 0, +1, +2). This instinctive reaction will be amplified by the structure and focus of existing military intelligence organizations. These organizations, whose role in conventional combat is to establish and monitor the enemy order of battle, will be unaccustomed to making fine grained distinctions between population categories. Early mistakes in framing the counterinsurgency problem contribute to the application of inappropriate military routines.

maintain their support in the face of hopeless odds. Here we are concerned with the opposite problem: how does variation in the government's counterinsurgency strategy activate mechanisms that increase or decrease local resistance?

Initial Military Perception of Rebellion



Misunderstanding of the counterinsurgency problem limits the organization's ability to interpret performance feedback correctly. Here again, surface similarity creates the illusion of understanding. Some of the most important cues in conventional war – particularly loss ratios – are present, while others are notably absent - territorial gains or rates of advance.¹⁰² The natural tendency for military leaders is to lock on to the trusted indicators that are present, and assume that familiar cues retain their original meanings. If in the past battle performance hinged on the number of enemy killed and captured, and the battle space lacks any meaningful spatial dimension, then a focus on attrition is the logical solution.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Counterinsurgency does have a spatial dimension, but the familiar references of the conventional battlefield – rates of advance and seizure of key terrain - are largely absent. Control of terrain proves to be maddeningly impermanent. This in turn upsets a familiar cause and effect belief: the idea that territorial gains are cumulative.

¹⁰³ Ibid., Rosen pp. 114-115 on WWI British models.

In reality, both the meaning and utility of the cues are quite different in counterinsurgency. Whereas the ecological validity and discrimination rates of loss ratios are very high in conventional war, both are much lower in counterinsurgency. The number of enemy killed in an engagement is only distantly related to success in political stabilization, and operations in which large numbers of insurgents are killed at the cost of high collateral damage may have a negative net influence on campaign performance. In other words, enemy killed or captured may no longer be a highly effective predictor of task performance at the campaign level. Similarly, comparisons of loss ratios are less useful in gauging the relative success of different operations. Many operations will tend to produce similar results – a handful of enemy killed or captured, a handful of weapons and money confiscated. These measures alone do not generally give the military leader much insight into the relative contribution of similar operations. These changes highlight one of the major sources of military confusion in counterinsurgency – the need to re-evaluate the meaning and utility of familiar cues.

Just as the value of familiar cues drops, the importance of what was once considered noise increases. In conventional war, the attitudes of the local population are inconsequential. Wars are decided by competing armies, not opinion polls or elections, and the military commander can safely assume that this attitude data adds little to the decision process. By contrast, popular attitudes are a primary driver of the strength of insurgencies. The willingness of the population to assist the insurgents or the government depends on their perception of security and the legitimacy of the warring parties. Similarly, the penalties associated with killing civilians (the false positive in target classification) are dramatically higher. In conventional war, civilian casualty or

property damage may be regrettable but seldom influences the outcome of the contest on any level. In counterinsurgency, the killing of civilians may have a decisive effect on the effectiveness of strategy on the local and national level.¹⁰⁴ What was once signal – loss ratios – is now noise; what was once noise – local attitudes – is now signal.

The military leader accustomed to conventional war may be unsettled by these shifts in the utility of environmental cues. Much of what he “knows” – routines, decision rules, and measures of effectiveness – is only distantly related to the new problem, and prompt action against his armed opponents may not clarify the situation. In the best case, the commander recognizes the declining utility of old models, rules, and metrics and searches for new and more appropriate ways of addressing the problem. In many cases, attention to old models and rules instead produces a false sense of certainty, control, and progress. This will delay the search for new and more appropriate rules and strategies. In the worst case, the commander clings to the old models and rules under the assumption that escalation in their scale and intensity can resolve the problem.

The Gap between Military and Civilian Opinion

The military perception of counter-insurgency is unique to the profession. Other parties, particularly diplomats and politicians, apply different professional models to the same task. Where the soldier reflexively focuses on the armed opponent and his destruction, the diplomat sees a violent political problem best resolved by suasion. While the military professional and the politician may agree on the importance of restoring order and the indispensability of force, they will differ widely in their interpretation of

¹⁰⁴ Jon Lindsay has noted that the fundamental distinction between conventional war and counterinsurgency is that the penalties for false positives are far higher in counterinsurgency.

how force should be applied. Where soldiers rely on the one way application of force to pacify their opponents, politicians typically see a two way exchange between the intervening force and the local population and elites as a means of securing popular consent. This clash of models, one predicated on battle and the other on bargaining, explains both the military propensity to inflame the problem and the natural friction between civilians and the military in counterinsurgency.

John Masters, a British officer serving in the Northwest frontier province in the late 1930s, summarized the chasm separating military and political professional opinion in counterinsurgency:

For a year the regiment had been training for this particular game – “a Frontier show” – trying to weld the rules of successful warfare with the rules laid down by the government for Frontier campaigning. The two conflicted violently, and we, girding for war, heard ourselves being advised by contrapuntal voices. The first voice, that of military experience in all the wars of recorded history, was hard, unequivocal, and merciless. The second voice, that of the civil government, was oleaginous, ambiguous – and merciless. The chant went like this, and I sang it gloomily to myself to a psalm tune:

Get there fustest with the mostest men.

Do not get there at all until we have referred the matter to the Governor-General-in-Council, which will take months.

Shoot first, shoot fastest, shoot last, and shoot to kill.

Do not shoot unless you have been shot at, and then try not to hurt anyone, there's a good chap!

Mystify, mislead, and surprise the enemy, then never leave him a moment to gather himself again, but fall on him like a thunderclap and pursue him to his utter destruction, regardless of fatigue, casualties, or cost.

Announce your intentions to the enemy, in order that he may have time to remove his women and children to a place of safety – and time to counter your plan. At all events, stop what you are doing as soon as he pretends to have had enough, so that he may gather again somewhere else.

Casualties, damage, losses, cost, are only some of the many factors to be considered when making a battle plan. If any factor is given undue weight, the plan is likely to fail.

Pardon us, but your plan does not interest us. We are happy to say that that is your business. However, casualties cause questions in the House, damage brings complaints in the Assembly, losses get in the newspapers, and cost we cannot stand, in view of the depleted state of the country's

finances. Remember all that, and get the war over quickly. And if you should fail – Ah, but there – you won’t fail, old chap, will you?

In the end a reasonable compromise was reached and the thing was done, in an attitude varying between the soldier’s downright description of the Pathan as “enemy,” and the political’s opinion of him as a “misguided fellow citizen.” It was seldom done as quickly as the army would have liked, given the men, the money, and a free hand to make a job of it; nor as pleasantly and as cautiously as the politicals would have liked, given the time to alter circumstances. Sensible soldiers, in spite of furiously grouching and bitter complaints – more bitter every time we saw our mutilated dead – realized well that we were not in fact fighting a true enemy. We accepted with good will most of the limitations placed on us, but always remembered our overriding duty to the men who trusted us.¹⁰⁵

Masters’ commentary is telling not simply in its clever summary of the contrasts, but in its admission that both parties were probably half right. Diplomats may have advocated greater restraint than was feasible in the border wars, but soldiers may have been too quick to define the problem as total war. The process of interagency argument produced, in Masters’ opinion, a solution superior to that of either the diplomats or soldiers alone. It is also worth noting that Masters highlights the red line drawn by the military in this compromise – the physical protection of the unit and soldiers. Restraint may be acceptable, even necessary, but it can never be allowed to compromise the security of one’s own.

Military Control of Counterinsurgent Strategy

The creative tension that Masters describes is often missing in the prosecution of counterinsurgency campaigns. Governments cede policy leadership in counterinsurgency to the military for a number of reasons. First, the outbreak of insurgency reflects the

¹⁰⁵ John Masters, *Bugles and a Tiger* (New York: Viking Press, 1956), pp. 195-197.

failure of civil authority. If civilian authorities were capable of righting the situation, then there would be no need to employ the military. In practice, however, governments tend to assume that the breakdown of civilian administration demands a complete transfer of responsibility to the military until order has been restored. That the visible symptoms of insurgency appear to match the job description of the military only reinforces the government's instinct to pass control to the army.¹⁰⁶ Second, the military is often the only government agency capable of implementing counterinsurgency policy. The military has at its disposal enormous human and material resources and is designed to operate in hostile environments.¹⁰⁷ By contrast, the civil service, with its traditional focus on diplomacy and bureaucratic policymaking, generally lacks the training, organizational structure, or inclination to implement policy. For these reasons, the military is seen as the only agency that can put a political-military plan into action.¹⁰⁸ Over time, the line between implementation and policy formulation blurs, and the cumulative decisions of military leaders come to define the government's counterinsurgency policy.

The natural flow of resources in counterinsurgency reinforces the government's inclination to delegate policy to the military. The violent symptoms of insurgency lead the government to allocate the majority of resources to the military. These include not only weapons, but also the staff and logistical assets that are central to political and civil reconstruction. The decision to steer the majority of funds to the military increases its

¹⁰⁶ The governments of established, stable societies often lack skills or experience relevant to the creation of new political orders. Politicians in established political systems are caretakers, they are not designers or builders of political systems. In this sense, the missing skill set in counterinsurgency is not the diplomatic or parliamentary one. Instead, counterinsurgency demands the sensibility of the boss of a political machine or organized crime group.

¹⁰⁷ Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), pp. 42.

¹⁰⁸ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (St. Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2005), pp. 88.

organizational advantages over other government agencies, and makes less likely the development and implementation of large-scale, non-military programs.

Two more general influences add to this momentum in favor of military leadership in counterinsurgency policy. First, conventional beliefs on civil-military relations may lead politicians and military leaders to assume that delegation of strategy in wartime will improve policy performance and civil-military relations.¹⁰⁹ If this is true, then the maintenance of separate spheres of military strategy and state policy in counterinsurgency, as in conventional war, is a logical objective. Second, civilian leaders often seek to concentrate authority in a single individual or organization. The sheer difficulty of building new organizational structures to manage counterinsurgency policy and the friction involved in forging ad hoc inter-agency coordination makes the delegation of policy to the military more appealing.

The true test of who leads has little to do with the nominal responsibilities of the competing agencies. In many cases, nominal authority for overall counterinsurgent strategy rested with the senior civilian decision makers on the ground and in the respective capitals. In practice, however, it was the agency that consistently won inter-agency disputes over the content of policy or the allocation of resources that was the real policy leader. Measured in these terms, policy leadership in Algeria and Vietnam,¹¹⁰ and to a lesser extent in Afghanistan and Iraq, has rested in the hands of the military command rather than the civil authorities.

¹⁰⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp.85; *ibid.*, Cohen, pp. 225-228.

¹¹⁰ My interpretation here is broadly consistent with that advanced by Eliot Cohen in *Supreme Command*. While the Johnson Administration was deeply involved in the conduct of the air war, it left the execution of the ground war almost entirely to General Westmorland and the Chiefs of Staff (*ibid.*, Cohen, pp. 175-185).

The Results of Misunderstanding

The mismatch between the mental models of military organizations and the task of counterinsurgency produces a dominant pattern of intrawar and interwar behavior. In general, military organizations will start by applying known rules and routines to a problem they consider familiar. Mixed performance feedback, including positive battlefield results, will lead to exploitation rather than exploration or search. Only when the opportunities for process refinement and escalation have been exhausted are militaries likely to explore. The first step is to develop new routines and incorporate them into existing military models. The final step is to substitute new rules and models that help the organization apply existing and new routines to the specific challenges of counterinsurgency.

Patterned Response and Exploitation

Military leaders will tend to respond to the presence of armed rebellion with a show of force and large unit offensive operations. Military leaders generally assume that an opponent who is vastly weaker in material terms will recognize, either in principle or on the battlefield, the futility of resistance. With its emphasis on coercion and decisive battle, the military operational code encourages military leaders to devote the majority of their efforts and resources to a direct attack on the armed insurgents (+3) and their supporters (+2) (see diagram below). Preferred strategies may include aggressive patrolling, large unit search and destroy operations, and mass detentions. Colonel C.E. Calwell, a British officer writing in the early twentieth century, aptly expressed this belief in the importance of offensive action in forcing the submission of restive populations:

... in a small war the only possible attitude to assume is...the offensive. The regular army must force its way into the enemy's country and seek him out. It must be ready to fight him wherever he may be found.... It is not merely a question of maintaining the initiative, but of compelling the enemy to see at every turn that he has lost it, and to recognize that the forces of civilization are dominant and not to be denied.... Since fights are difficult to bring about, and inasmuch as it is on the battlefield that the issue must be decided, it is obvious that when an action has been brought on, mere victory is not enough. The enemy must not only be beaten. He must be beaten thoroughly....The mere expulsion of the opponent from ground where he has thought fit to accept battle is of small account; what is wanted is a big casualty list in the hostile ranks – they have been brought up to the scratch of accepting battle, they must feel what battle against a discipline army means.¹¹¹

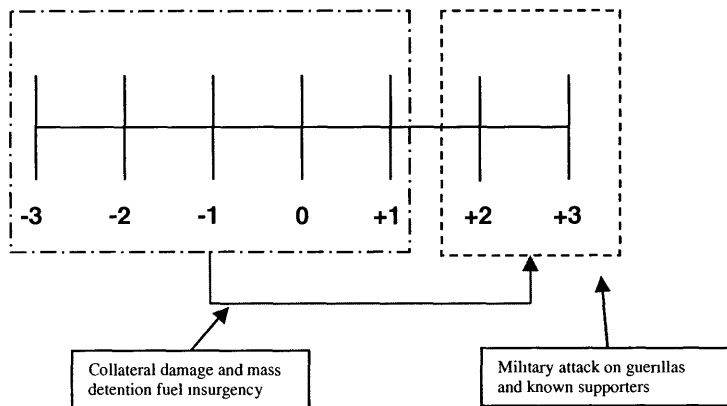
In short, the emphasis in counterinsurgency settings should be on offensive operations carried out under an expansive definition of the enemy and its supporters.¹¹²

Offensive strategies of this type almost always produce mixed results. On the one hand, they can inflict significant damage on the guerillas and their support network. On the other hand, these strategies can alienate uncommitted segments of the local population. Sympathetic or neutral citizens (-1 or 0) may respond to coercive tactics by increasing their support for the insurgent movement (i.e. citizens may move from the middle of Petersen's spectrum (-1 or 0) towards more active resistance (levels +1 → +3)). Military leaders accustomed to treating the population as insignificant and largely passive may not immediately grasp the connection between collateral damage and campaign level stalemate.

¹¹¹ Colonel C.E. Calwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, Third Edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 75; 151-152

¹¹² Lest we consider Calwell's views anachronistic, it is worth citing Douglas Pike's characterization of prevailing military views of the Vietnam conflict: "Some Americans viewed the Vietnam War as ordinary war, a test of military force. They held that regardless of how esoteric the enemy's tactics might be or how much he might attempt to confuse the scene by mixing in non-military considerations, the fact remained that North Vietnam and communist minority in the South were attempting to conquer South Vietnam by force. This military effort must be matched by counter-force, decimating in character and punitive in purpose. The enemy must be smashed militarily, North and South....Victory meant enemy capitulation, if not openly and formally, at least tacitly and in any event obvious and apparent to all." (Source: Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1986), pp. 249).

Conventional Military Response



While the operational code plays an important role in the initial choice of counterinsurgent strategies, it has an even more profound impact on the military's reaction to performance feedback. As classical organizational theory suggests, organizations are unlikely to change their strategy unless there is clear evidence that the strategy has failed.¹¹³ The problem in counterinsurgency is that the military's preferred set of strategies - attacks on guerillas and their support base - generates clear and largely positive feedback. Large scale operations against guerillas generally produce some number of enemy killed and materiel captured, and there is very little chance that such operations will result in a decisive defeat of the counterinsurgent forces.¹¹⁴ In a sense, these operations are controlled experiments in which the outcome is largely predetermined and serves to validate the preferred strategy. Roger Trinquier, himself a

¹¹³ Ibid., March, Simon, *Organizations*, pp. 173.

¹¹⁴ There are important exceptions to this rule. Under certain circumstances, such as the extensive use of mines or other passive weapons, counterinsurgent loss ratios may favor the insurgent. However, even when counterinsurgent casualties rise, they almost always control the field of battle after the engagement – the second familiar measure of effectiveness. Consequently, militaries may still score Pyrrhic engagements as small victories.

veteran of counterinsurgency campaigns in Indochina and Algeria, describes this effect as follows:

The certainty of never running a risk of a clear defeat, such as an equally armed opponent could inflict upon us, enables any military commander to conduct some sort of operation. Even if the guerilla bands are not destroyed, at least the geographical objectives are secured within the prescribed time and a few dead rebels will always balance the account. If, moreover, a few arms are recovered, the operation, which has been carried out like a normal peacetime maneuver, then assumes the air of battle and victory sufficient to satisfy a commander who is not too exacting. But what is essential – *the destruction of the enemy's potential for warfare* – is never accomplished, principally because it is never seriously contemplated.¹¹⁵

An uninterrupted string of such successes, what Petersen calls “small victories,”¹¹⁶ can convince the counterinsurgent force that its overall strategic approach is sound. This will lead the military to focus on focus on exploitation of existing routines (e.g., refinement of patrolling, raids, the employment of new technologies, etc.) and ignore larger problems inherent in their overall strategy.

At the same time, the military has difficulty internalizing the negative effects of aggressive the standard military response. On the one hand, performance feedback on the political dimensions of the counterinsurgent contest is intrinsically opaque; where performance feedback in conventional operations is simple, quantitative, frequent, and continuous, feedback on the support of the population or the legitimacy of the regime is complex, ambiguous, lagged,¹¹⁷ and intermittent. In addition, the professional mindset acts as a subjective filter on incoming performance feedback. Since the results of conventional military operations are generally mixed – some insurgents killed, some

¹¹⁵ Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1985), pp. 59.

¹¹⁶ Petersen cites the “small victories” hypothesis as one irrational mechanism that leads insurgents to continue their struggle even in the face of insuperable odds. The situation here is the converse; the military regards a series of “small victories” as proof of the validity of its counterinsurgency strategy (Source: Petersen, pp. 76-78).

¹¹⁷ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (St. Petersburg: Hailer Publishing, 1964/2005), pp. 96.

innocents and property damaged – militaries must decide whether to continue these strategies or change them. The operational code, with its implicit set of priorities, leads militaries to assign greater weight to the military cues that are familiar, clear, and positive. By contrast, feedback that is less familiar, less positive (e.g. the political impact of offensive operations on the local population), and less encouraging is discounted.

The objective measurement problem and the subjective weighting of performance feedback represent enormous barriers to organizational learning. On a local level, militaries will tend to see their innumerable “small victories” as proof of the validity of their initial strategy. They will assume that these gains are cumulative and permanent. The inability to translate these victories into an overall victory will be chalked up to insufficient force, time, or efficiency; since the aggressive policy appears sound on a micro-level, the solution is generally to loosen strictures, add more resources, continue the offensive, and refine existing routines. Simply put, militaries will exploit rather than explore; they will invest in improving performance of the existing strategies and will not re-examine the fit between those strategies and the state’s policy goals. Together, the temptation to exploit and escalate will tend to delay broader search and produce an escalating stalemate.

Selective Interwar Retention: Misinterpreting past experience

The same ideas and incentives that impair organizational performance within counterinsurgency campaigns distort post-war behavior. Militaries that have failed to subdue an insurgent opponent will tend to find explanations and solutions within the bounds of the MOC. Military leaders will typically point the inadequacy of means

(military manpower or equipment) or insufficient civilian resolve rather than underlying flaws in strategy. Conventional routines which have been refined as part of counter-guerilla operations (raids, cordon and search, encirclement, patrols) will be retained. “Dual use” routines that have clear utility in conventional war are most likely to be retained. Advances in mobility, precision attack, and firepower will be incorporated into general doctrine.

Retaining the strategic lessons of counterinsurgency will prove more difficult than learning them. By contrast, uncomfortable organizational changes that are justifiable when lives and reputations were at stake may not be rejected when that pressure is removed. Pent up demands for modernization will collide with attempts to retain capabilities that are specific to counterinsurgency. Counterinsurgent strategies that impinge on military autonomy or emphasize interagency coordination will be jettisoned.

In general, routines are more likely to be retained than new rules or models. Within each of these categories, changes that are compatible with existing beliefs are likely to survive the transition; those that are not are likely to be rejected.

Disliking the Solution: The Role of Motivated Bias

Simple bias provides a compelling explanation for much of the trouble militaries encounter in intrawar adaptation. The military operational code explains the standard progression of inappropriate patterned response, misinterpretation of feedback, and delayed search for appropriate strategies. By extension, it provides an explanation for the postwar misinterpretation of wartime experience; the same beliefs that distorted strategic choice and performance evaluation during the conflict can easily lead military

professionals to ascribe campaign failure to inadequate resources, time, civilian commitment, or ruthlessness rather than more basic flaws in strategy.

Where simple bias falls short is in the explanation of the phenomenon of the postwar counterinsurgency purge. While most militaries improve their counterinsurgency strategy over the course of a campaign, they tend to cull many of the core lessons in the period immediate following the war. In the course of almost every campaign, advocates emerge who recognize the fundamental differences between insurgency and conventional war and propose more appropriate strategies: John Paul Vann, Robert Komer, David Galula, Roger Trinquier, Robert Thompson, David Petraeus. Instead of elevating these leaders and incorporating these lessons into official doctrine and training, most militaries sideline them and retain only those routines and strategies that are consistent with the core interests of the organization.

Consequently, even those armies with extensive and recent experience in counterinsurgency enter subsequent campaigns with the same set of ineffective routines and strategies they applied in the opening stages of earlier campaigns. Strategies and routines developed over time and at great expense in earlier campaigns are not applied, while the “worst practices” are applied instead. These militaries tap neither their own best practices nor those of other militaries. This is true in spite of wide agreement on the principles of counterinsurgency and the ready availability of such ideas in their own history and that of other nations. Far from building on their experience, most militaries fail the far easier test of simple, short term retention.

The speed and selectivity of the postwar purge suggests that this is not a matter of simple forgetfulness.¹¹⁸ The same militaries that struggle mightily to unlearn conventional strategies over the course of a long campaign seem quite adept at unlearning unconventional ones in the immediate postwar period. Whether measured in terms of spending, doctrine, training, or professional education, military interest in counterinsurgency tends to drop sharply almost as soon as the fighting subsides.

I argue that the serial amnesia of professional militaries is an expression of motivated bias. Simple bias explains why it is hard to develop appropriate solutions in wartime and why past experience might be misinterpreted; motivated bias explains the rejection of proven solutions once task pressure has been removed. Militaries that develop effective solutions to the problems of counterinsurgency ultimately discard many of these solutions on the grounds that they undermine the fundamental organizational interests. Militaries are not selfless problem solvers; they are bureaucratic organizations that must balance the desire to succeed in their appointed task against their interests in the long term health of the organization. Military bureaucracies, like their civilian counterparts, seek to maximize their resources, autonomy and prestige.¹¹⁹ What makes the

¹¹⁸As noted in Chapter One, there are two potential alternative explanations for this type of organizational forgetting: rational expectations and organizational attrition. First, militaries might discard these ideas because they assume they are unlikely to face similar situations in the future. The problem is that counterinsurgency has proven far more common than conventional, great power war for much of the past century. Second, militaries might forget as personnel turnover and the passage of time erode organizational memory. The suddenness of the counterinsurgency purge belies this explanation – the shift away from counterinsurgency occurs long before personnel turnover and simple memory loss could have a dramatic effect.

¹¹⁹Morton H. Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1974); Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study of Politics and Organization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949); Graham Allison, *The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Harper Collins, 1971); James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

strategic lessons, the so-called “best practices” of counterinsurgency, so impermanent is their incompatibility with these core organizational interests.¹²⁰

The assumption of some level of bureaucratic as opposed to task motivation explains a number of common patterns in the intrawar adaptation as well. On closer examination, the allocation of resources and attention in counterinsurgency campaigns reflects more than a single minded focus on task performance. Population security is paramount in almost all theories of counterinsurgency. In order to provide that security, militaries must disperse their troops and accept the increase risk that this dispersion and exposure entails. In practice, many militaries resist the implementation of such proven operational concepts because they threaten the survival of personnel and units. Instead, militaries frequently give precedence to force protection over task performance. Militaries expend copious resources on the construction of fortifications and the protection of convoys even though these measures are at best secondary to the problem of population security. Debates about rules of engagement also reflect the fundamental tension between the desire to succeed and the desire to survive. The principle of minimal or proportional force means the assumption of greater risk on the grounds of task performance. Where there are clear tradeoffs between task accomplishment and self-preservation, the military organization will resist operational concepts that jeopardize the force and embrace them only as a last resort. By contrast, militaries will tend to overfund those routines that are related to the task and reinforce the survival imperative.

¹²⁰ There are other examples of high risk, low benefit missions which militaries have sought to purge in postwar periods. Close air support, antisubmarine warfare and naval mine countermeasures are examples of missions that are learned in wartime at great expense only to be jettisoned in peacetime. What distinguishes them from counterinsurgency is the absence of an equivalent level of cognitive misunderstanding of the task. Air forces understand close air support and dislike it. Armies not only dislike counterinsurgency, they misunderstand it. In general, the combination of misunderstanding and revulsion is more difficult to overcome than revulsion alone.

Militaries as Bureaucratic Maximizers

One of the central insights of organization theory is that bureaucracies, whatever their formal mandate, are self-interested. While they may seek to accomplish the tasks that are set before them, they are also careful to guard against policies that undermine the long term health of the organization.

The literature on organizational interests suggests that bureaucratic organizations share a common set of general core motivations. Organizations, like organisms, seek to survive. In order to survive and prosper, organizations seek to maximize their autonomy, resources and prestige. While there are important constraints on the impulse to maximize these goods,¹²¹ and tradeoffs among these goals are significant,¹²² it is sufficient for the purposes of this study to posit that militaries are motivated by these same impulses.

Autonomy, Resources, and Prestige

James Q. Wilson, building on the work of Philip Selznick and others, observes that bureaucracies seek to maximize their autonomy in both an internal and an external sense.¹²³ On an external level, organizations seek to establish monopoly control over their domain and resist external constraints, oversight, and cooperation with other organizations. On an internal level, autonomy means control over the identity, mission, and central tasks of the organization.¹²⁴ Organizations will tend to resist efforts by

¹²¹ Ibid., Wilson, pp. 182.

¹²² Ibid., Halperin, pp. 51; *ibid.*, Wilson, pp. 179.

¹²³ Ibid., Wilson, pp. 188.

¹²⁴ Morton Halperin makes a similar point in his discussion of the “organizational essence.” According to Halperin, organizations will seek to preserve or advance the organizational essence (Source: Halperin, pp. 28, 39-40)

outside actors of organizations to redefine this identity. On both levels, the organization seeks to preserve its “freedom of maneuver,” minimizing competition with rival organizations and oversight by other government entities. Wilson also notes that organizations generally prefer autonomy to resources. Given an opportunity to acquire additional resources at the cost of reduced autonomy, most organizations will forgo those resources in the interest of preserving internal and external autonomy.¹²⁵

While organizations may prefer autonomy to resources, they will seek to accumulate resources if this is possible without compromising that autonomy.¹²⁶ Resources may come in the form of expanded budgets or in the form of additional human resources. Resources are welcomed so long as leaders are free to use them as they see fit. Resources that must be spent in ways that are prescribed by outsiders are mixed blessings as they represent encroachments on the autonomy of the organization.

All things being equal, organizations prefer policies that increase the long terms prestige and influence of the organization. Prestige matters because it indirectly determines the autonomy and resources available over the long term. Organizations that are held in high esteem will tend to attract more resources and fend off oversight; those with low prestige may see their budgets cut or oversight tightened. Not surprisingly, organizations will avoid courses of action that are likely to undermine their prestige and influence. Some such decisions may be “learned vulnerabilities,”¹²⁷ areas in which organization has failed in the past and is eager to avoid repeated debacles. Concern for prestige also amplifies the organization’s distaste for interagency or collaborative

¹²⁵ Ibid., Wilson, pp. 179-180, 182.

¹²⁶ Ibid., Wilson, pp. 179.

¹²⁷ Ibid., Wilson, pp. 192.

endeavors. The absence of complete control over strategy leaves partners in interagency policies exposed to the failures of the other parties.¹²⁸

The “Best Practices” of Counterinsurgency: The Unpalatable Solution Set

A review of the twentieth century literature on counterinsurgency reveals a broadly accepted and historically stable set of principles of counterinsurgency - a rough canon of “best practices” that stands in sharp contrast to the conventional principles of war. These principles are not unique to any one national tradition. Drawing on very different historical experiences, a wide range of Western authors have articulated a remarkably similar set of principles and operational concepts specific to counterinsurgency.¹²⁹ While these principles and concepts represent at best an incomplete model, they are nonetheless internally consistent and squarely at odds with generally accepted principles of conventional war.

What is clear is that the content of this “best practices” set is deeply unappealing to professional militaries. It is not simply that the ideas are foreign, though this undoubtedly plays some role. Foreign ideas that have proved their worth ought to be candidates for retention and inclusion in military doctrine. Here the problem is that what must be done to solve the problem impinges on the core equities of the military organization.

¹²⁸ Ibid., Wilson, pp. 191.

¹²⁹ Major General Sir Charles Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (Edinburgh: MacMillan & Co., Ltd, 1936); Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (New York: Praeger, 1966); Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977); Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1985); Robert Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict* (London: Westview Press, 1986).

Principles of Counterinsurgency

Writing in the mid-1930s, British Major General Charles Gwynn outlined a set of basic principles of that would be familiar to almost any student of modern counterinsurgency.¹³⁰ While subsequent authors have generated more comprehensive lists, Gwynn's formulation is among the simplest and highlights the tension between the military organizational imperatives and the "best practices" of counterinsurgency.

Gwynn proposes four core principles: civilian control of policy, minimum force, firm and timely action, and civil-military cooperation.¹³¹ Gwynn argues that the military must, even when in "full executive control," act in accordance with the policy of the civilian government.¹³² While the military commander must provide relevant advice on the employment of military assets, he is not entitled to "force the hand of the Government."¹³³ In his call for the use of minimum force, Gwynn notes that the members of the opposition are not true enemies but rather fellow citizens.¹³⁴ For this reason, every effort must be taken to ensure that the restoration of order does not undermine reconciliation over the longer run. Gwynn sees this commitment to minimum force as entirely consistent with his third principle, that of firm and timely response. He argues that it is imperative that violent opposition be confronted in its early stages lest it expand in scale and severity. Gwynn's final principle is the importance of civil-military cooperation. He observes that rebellion requires the unfettered cooperation of civil and

¹³⁰ Major General Sir Charles Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (Edinburgh: MacMillan & Co., Ltd, 1936), pp. 10-16.

¹³¹ Ibid., Gwynn, pp. 13-16.

¹³² Ibid., Gwynn, pp. 13.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 14.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 14.

military authorities. Such coordination between the civilian authorities is particularly important when the question of overall executive control is unclear.

Gwynn goes on to outline a rough strategy to address the outbreak of rebellion:

The suppression of such movements, unless nipped in the bud, is a slow business, generally necessitating the employment of numbers all out of proportion to the actual fighting value of the rebels, owing to the unavoidable dispersion of troops and the absence of a definite objective. It becomes a battle of wits in which the development of a well-organised intelligence service, great mobility, rapid means of inter-communication, and close co-operation between all sections of the Government sources are essential.¹³⁵

Seen from the vantage point of the professional military, Gwynn's prescription is deeply unappealing. While most military leaders would embrace Gwynn's call for swift and firm action against rebels, his remaining injunctions run counter to the military's fundamental interests in survival, autonomy, resources and prestige.

Civilian control of policy and close coordination involve the functional subordination of the military in its own stated realm of expertise – the exercise of force. Far from enhancing military autonomy, this mode of operation guarantees extensive constraints and an essentially a subordinate position. It is one thing to argue in favor of unity of effort; it is another to embark on a course that reduces the military to a minor player in the arena of armed conflict.

The minimum force principle is objectionable on similar grounds. Demands to restrict force and subordinate the exercise of force to the strictures of law undermine military autonomy. They represent fundamental incursions by civilians into the management of violence. What is more, the specific compromises in this area inevitably expose counterinsurgent forces to greater risk. Maximum force protects the counterinsurgent force at the expense of the population; minimum force protects the population at the cost of additional military casualties.

¹³⁵ Ibid., Gwynn, pp. 11-12.

While counterinsurgency might be expected to deliver additional resources to the military, these resources are seldom the kind militaries want. Counterinsurgency often sets up a tension between the military's desire to modernize its capital base and the need to fund ongoing operations of indeterminate duration. Armies often receive additional funds and manpower in the short run, but they are seldom available for use in modernization. When the campaign is over, pent up demand for delayed modernization schemes generally exceeds the funds available for all services. Viewed over the long run, counterinsurgency seldom brings armies the kind of resources that enable them to pursue their preferred modernization plans.

Counterinsurgency campaigns prosecuted in this way are unlikely to improve the prestige of the military as an organization. Military prestige, as perceived by relevant domestic audiences, is a function of task performance and professional conduct. Deliberate and carefully circumscribed military operations offer little in the way of glory and unlimited potential for disgrace. Even when they are competently run, counterinsurgency campaigns are long and almost devoid of spectacular victories. Given a balance of forces that overwhelmingly favors the counterinsurgent forces, tactical victory is assumed and the occasional tactical reverse is an embarrassment. Counterinsurgency by its nature brings troops into contact with a population that includes civilians and armed insurgents. The difficulty of distinguishing friends and enemies in populated areas makes incidents of abuse and overkill almost inevitable. Public exposure of such incidents damages the prestige of the military. Not only are they likely to suffer in budget terms, they are also less likely to attract and retain personnel necessary to maintain the organization.

Operational Concepts and Routines

The tension between what is useful and what is organizationally palatable is present at the level of routines as well as strategy. The accepted canon of “best practices” includes a number of operational whose practical appeal is offset by their implications for the health of the organization.

At the tactical level, the problem is generally the tradeoff between security and of the counterinsurgent force and the security of the population. Steps taken to ensure the protection of the local population increase the vulnerability of the counterinsurgent forces. Dispersion, whether in the form of advisory efforts, Combined Action Platoons, or the forts of the *beau geste*, exposes the counterinsurgent force to greater risk of tactical losses. The converse is also true. Steps taken to insulate counterinsurgent forces from the risks of insurgent attack, whether in the form of mounted patrols, large fortified bases, or permissive rules of engagement, purchase force protection at the cost of reduced information and decreased population security. Militaries will tend to resist the adoption of operational concepts and routines that entail the acceptance of additional force risk. While they may come to accept them as a last resort, they will be the last to be accepted and the first to be jettisoned.

Personnel rotation policy is another area in which the clash of function and organizational interest is clear. Effective population security can only be established if the counterinsurgent forces have a detailed understanding of the local area and its inhabitants. Frequent rotation of personnel effectively resets the process of organizational learning for the local unit and breaks the trust between the population and

the occupying forces. While all this is well understood, relatively short rotations are generally the rule. Framed in organizational terms, the explanation is quite simple. Longer rotations pose a threat to the morale of the military. Discontent among the troops or among the families of the troops will tend to undermine the military retention. Faced with a choice between a clearly suboptimal rotation policy and the threat of diminished morale and retention, most militaries put the long term health of the organization and its members before the accomplishment of the task.

Political military strategies, even when successful, represent long term challenges to the professional military as a bureaucratic entity. Clear and hold strategies focused on re-establishing security for the local population are intrinsically costly for the occupying force – they involve restrictive rules of engagement and dispersion that inevitably increase the casualties the force must sustain. While counterinsurgency will tend to bring additional resources to the ground forces during the war, these long campaigns are generally followed by a severe retrenchment in spending. Operations during the campaign consume funds that might otherwise have been devoted to capital modernization. Once the storm has passed, the ground forces, not to mention the air and naval components must compete to fulfill their pent up modernization demands in the face of steeply declining funding levels.

While this tension between task pressures and bureaucratic interests explains certain important anomalies in the course of intrawar adaptation, it is most evident in the interwar period. The sudden disappearance of immediate task pressure brings suppressed bureaucratic interests to the fore. Unpalatable strategies and routines that were grudgingly accepted over the course of a counterinsurgency campaign can be safely

discarded once the campaign is over. The organization can protect itself from future involvement in structurally unpleasant category of conflict by excising those capabilities. Such a purge decreases the likelihood that it will be forced to take up similar tasks in the future.¹³⁶

In short, professional militaries that expend enormous energy developing counterinsurgency expedients in wartime often jettison them shortly thereafter. While this rejection in part reflects the same cognitive problems that bedevil intrawar efforts, the speed and selectivity of the purge suggests something far more deliberate. Militaries do not like what the “best practices” of counterinsurgency entail: functional subordination to civilian politicians, increased risk, delayed modernization, and significant reputational risk.

Explaining Variation in Learning

Core beliefs and organizational interests exert a powerful systematic influence on the lessons militaries derive from counterinsurgency. While the patterns they generate are visible across a number of historical cases, these patterns are not laws. What militaries learn and what they retain varies in response to at least four broad, independent variables: perceived task performance (success/failure), task pressure, resource abundance, and civilian participation. These variables make themselves felt through their

¹³⁶ This is one interpretation of the Powell/Weinberger Doctrine in the U.S. context. By imposing strict limits of the type of missions the military can undertake, the military can avoid the undesirable task set. In reality, this approach only offers protection when counterinsurgency campaigns are the result of deliberate choice. If counterinsurgency campaigns are the unintended byproduct of conflict termination or alliance entanglements, then the “purge and avoid” approach may leave the military embroiled in counterinsurgency without the tools to address it.

influence on the timing, structure and extent of the organizational search for performance improvement.

*Task Performance: Failure induced search*¹³⁷

The military's perception of its own performance determines the timing and extent of organizational search in counterinsurgency. Since change is both costly and risky, the military is likely to continue on a given course unless there is clear evidence that they have failed to meet their goals.¹³⁸ Only when it clearly falls short of its aspirations is there a clear rationale to search for alternative solutions.¹³⁹ The desire to search is inversely proportional to the organization's level of performance satisfaction.¹⁴⁰ The perceived severity of failure will determine the extent of search and the costs the organization is willing to incur in order to rectify it.

While this basic logic holds in counterinsurgency, the structure of the problem introduces certain complications. First, unambiguous military defeat in counterinsurgency is rare, especially in the opening phases of these campaigns. Counterinsurgent forces generally enjoy substantial numerical and qualitative advantages over their opponents, making the chance of their suffering a major military defeat quite low.¹⁴¹ When it occurs, clear military defeat does prompt militaries to search for new solutions. The shock of the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu prompted a wholesale reappraisal of French counterinsurgency doctrine. Similarly, the shock of the Tet

¹³⁷ See James G. March, *A Primer on Decision making: How Decisions Happen* (New York: Free Press, 1994), pp. 28.

¹³⁸ Herbert A. Simon, James G. March, *Organizations* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1967), pp. 173-174.

¹³⁹ Richard M. Cyert, James G. March, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1992), pp. 41-44.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., March, Simon, pp. 174.

¹⁴¹ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (St. Petersburg: Hailer Publishing, 2005), pp. 72.

Offensive in Vietnam set off a process of self-evaluation that changed the shape of American strategy in the latter phases of the war.¹⁴²

Given the typical balance of forces between the insurgents and the government, failure is most likely to come in the form of stalemate. Over time, the military's inability to achieve its stated ends in spite of apparently uniform tactical success may prompt a re-examination of strategy. Unfortunately, the military's response to the paradox of tactical success and campaign stalemate is often to refine existing routines and escalate the intensity of the fight. This diversion costs time and resources and reduces the chance that a sound compelling strategic solution can be implemented once it is found.

While the recognition of failure may prompt search, it tells us very little about the structure or extent of that search. In and of itself, failure simply sets in motion a process whose outcome depends heavily on beliefs, interests and the remaining independent variables. Without a recognition of failure, ambitious search is highly unlikely; with it, the chance of search rises but its course and extent remain indeterminate.

Task Pressure

Militaries are interested problem solvers engaged in an ongoing balancing act. On the one hand, they seek to solve current and anticipated military problems. On the other hand, they are bureaucrats eager to defend the autonomy, resources, and prestige of the organization. The relative influence of these two sets of pressures, one external and task driven, the other internal and bureaucratic, depends on the level of task pressure they face.

¹⁴² Lewis Sorley, *Vietnam Chronicles: The Abrams Tapes (1968-1972)* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2004); Douglas Pike, *The Bunker Papers: Reports to the President from Vietnam, 1967-1973* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1990), Volumes 1-3.

For the purposes of this study, task pressure is the probability that task failure will lead to physical extinction. In total war, the prospect of extinction is real and ever present. The threat of extinction prompts militaries to focus on task performance and shelve longer term parochial concerns. As survival and task success become synonymous, the full energies of the military are devoted to practical problem solving. By contrast, peacetime militaries face little or no immediate task pressure.¹⁴³ While they may prepare for to fight future wars, they face no immediate threat of extinction. Under these circumstances, bureaucratic motivations tend to play the dominant role in explaining the course of organizational change. Limited war occupies a middle ground. Here the military must balance task performance against the desire to protect the organization's core interests.

While task pressure may vary over the course of counterinsurgency campaigns, this study focuses primarily on the step changes in task pressure between war and peace. During the course of expeditionary counterinsurgency campaigns, the moderate level of task pressure explains the mixed motives of military leaders. During such conflicts, the military tries to improve task performance but bureaucratic interests play a role in the screening of proposed routines and strategies. The transition from limited war to peace radically alters the balance between task concerns and bureaucratic interests. These sharp swings in task pressure act as a switching mechanism between the two categories of organizational motivation: one external and task oriented and the other internal and primarily bureaucratic.

¹⁴³ One could argue that peacetime armies are engaged in efforts to anticipate future conflicts; in some sense these expectations amount to some form of attenuated task pressure. That said, these pressures are not only uncertain and distant, they are as yet unrealized. They are far weaker influences on the military than the reality of limited war.

Moderate task pressure explains the modest pace, order, and extent of the search for counterinsurgency solutions. Where the threat of major defeat is modest, militaries are slow to engage in costly search. If such search proves necessary, then militaries will explore solutions in the order of increasing disruption; militaries will try solutions that are the least costly and least disruptive of core interests rather than those that are most likely to be effective. Finally, some solutions to counterinsurgency may be so disruptive that they are only acceptable to the military if the state or army is in peril. In limited war, there may be a set of strategies that are acknowledged to be effective but essentially off limits.

Although this study does not include any cases of domestic counterinsurgency, this subset of cases should follow the pattern laid out here. As the threat to the army and the state increases, the influence of parochial interests should recede. While the military may still struggle with cognitive obstacles to understanding counterinsurgency, it should not suffer the penalties associated with bureaucratic disincentives to change.

Task pressure is defined as a categorical variable with three values: high pressure (total war), moderate pressure (limited war), and minimal task pressure (peacetime). When task pressure is high, militaries will behave as simple problem solvers. They may continue to suffer the effects of the cognitive biases but they will tend to ignore or downplay bureaucratic pressures. When task pressure is moderate, as in the case of limited war and specifically expeditionary counterinsurgency, militaries will act as interested problem solvers. While they will seek to develop solutions to wartime problems, they will balance the utility of those solutions against their impact on bureaucratic interests. Under these circumstances, mixed motivation will influence the

order in which solutions are explored and implemented. Solutions that improve performance and are compatible with organizational interests will be implemented first. Solutions that run counter to bureaucratic interest may be considered, but only when more palatable alternatives have been tried and found to be inadequate. When task pressure is low or non-existent, the military will respond primarily to bureaucratic pressures. Routines and strategies will be judged primarily on their compatibility with bureaucratic imperatives rather than their proven or expected task utility. Routines and strategies that fit the bureaucratic imperatives and are useful will be retained and developed; those that are useful but bureaucratically suspect will be expunged.

Resource Abundance

The level of resources available to a state in counterinsurgency will exert a strong influence on the timing, order and extent of organizational search. In the context of this study, resources refer to the manpower and capital made available for the prosecution of a counterinsurgency campaign. What matters most is the level of resources available relative to the scale of a given counterinsurgency problem. All things being equal, resource scarcity will tend to accelerate search and push militaries to move beyond their preferred solutions. Abundant resources enable militaries to follow apply their preferred strategies and to use escalation as an alternative to search.

For several decades there has been a lively and unresolved scholarly debate on the influence of resources on innovation.¹⁴⁴ One group has argued that resource abundance

¹⁴⁴ Riitta Katila, Scott Shane, "When does lack of resources make new firms innovate?" *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 5, 2005; Jitendra Singh, "Performance, Slack and Risk Taking in Organizational Decision making," *Academy of Management Journal*, Volume 29, No. 3, 1986.

encourages innovation.¹⁴⁵ This group has argued that slack, the existence of spare resources above and beyond the normal requirements of the organization, enables organizations to engage in open ended search for innovation. The second group has argued that resource scarcity stimulates search. This study argues that military behavior in counterinsurgency conforms to the second hypothesis – that scarcity stimulates wartime search and abundance impedes it.

Resources influence search in three ways: budget constraints, bureaucratic influence and factor endowment effects. First, resource scarcity prevents militaries from pursuing military strategies that are resource intensive. Lacking the resources to pursue their preferred strategies, militaries are forced to explore alternative strategies far earlier than they normally would. The inability to pursue large scale conventional operations allows militaries to sidestep the illusory gains and collateral damage of conventional response and forces them to engage in conscious search rather than patterned response. The gap between the requirements of a conventional campaign and the available resources may need to be quite severe to trigger this switch in initial response. So long as militaries believe that they can engage the enemy in conventional military operations, the temptation to do so will be great. Second, resource abundance affects the leadership of the campaign, particularly the degree of military dominance in decision making. When resources are abundant, militaries will play a disproportionately powerful role and will tend to crowd out the influences of other parties (civilian administrators, police, special forces, intelligence services).¹⁴⁶ When the military is the hegemon in the interagency process, the military operational code is the logic that dominates counterinsurgency

¹⁴⁵ Christos Pitelis, "A Behavioral Resources Based View of the Firm: The Synergy of Cyert and March and Penrose," *Organization Science*, Vol. 18., No. 3, May-June 2007.

¹⁴⁶ Austin Long has made this point in various formal and informal discussions.

strategy. When resources are scarce, non-military groups are more likely to play prominent roles in strategy and are more likely to challenge the reflexive application and interpretation of conventional strategies.

Third, the mix of resources committed, particularly the balance between capital and manpower, will affect the structure and outcome of search. High manpower to capital ratios will encourage militaries to engage in large scale pacification operations. When weapons rather than financial aid are extended, the weapons provided will themselves influence the path of military strategy. Militaries provided with conventional military platforms will be more likely to follow that path.

Sharp changes in resource abundance over the course of a campaign will act as environmental shocks.¹⁴⁷ Resource shocks will jar militaries out of existing strategies and into new ones. This effect holds in both directions. Sharp decreases in available resources will force militaries to reconsider strategy and look beyond military solutions; sharp increases in resources may entice leaders into a rapid conventional military escalation aimed at inflicting a decisive defeat on the insurgents.

In short, resource scarcity will tend to stimulate early search for alternative strategies; resource abundance will tend to prolong the application of preferred military solutions that rely on conventional military operations. Intrawar resource shocks may drive militaries to switch strategy with new resources encouraging a return to conventional operations and resource cuts driving militaries to non-traditional solutions.

¹⁴⁷ Cynthia Lengnick-Hall, Tammy Beck, "Adaptive fit versus Robust Transformation: How Organizations Respond to Environmental Change," *Journal of Management*, Vol. 31, No. 5, 2005; Gerard George, "Slack resources and the performance of privately held firms," *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 4, 2005

Civilian Participation

Military domination of decision making in counterinsurgency explains the tendency of states to pursue conventional military strategies and delay the search for more effective strategies. Increased civilian participation in routine, operational decisions on the use of force increases the chances that the state can avoid inappropriate response. While it is quite common for militaries to bemoan excessive civilian intervention in wartime policymaking, this is a case where non-intervention practically guarantees inappropriate response to the problem.

Objections to civilian participation in the development of strategy fall into two categories. Military professionals often argue that civilian leaders lack the fortitude to endorse necessarily violent solutions to counterinsurgency problems. By diluting the state's commitment to such courses of action, civilians may increase the chances of campaign failure. Others argue that civilian participation necessarily undermines unity of effort. Not only are civilians likely to downplay the necessary role of violence, but the clash of civilian and military opinion will impede the formulation of an effective state strategy.

High levels of civilian participation in counterinsurgency strategy can interrupt the counterinsurgency spiral in three ways. First, active civilian participation can force militaries to examine their otherwise reflexive reactions to counterinsurgency – the mechanism of deliberate choice. Many early responses to counterinsurgency are patterned responses rather than carefully examined choices and simple contestation early in the process increases the chances that inappropriate responses will be scrutinized

earlier. Second, civilians bring a separate set of beliefs and preferences to the counterinsurgency problem that enable them to evaluate performance in different ways. This makes possible a parallel search for new solutions rather than a serial one pursued from a distinctly military starting point. Third, civilians, particularly those with experience in domestic politics as opposed to international diplomacy, will be more attuned to the relevance of political exchange. Whereas militaries will tend to approach counterinsurgency as some variety limited war, civilian politicians are more likely to recognize the underlying problem of state consolidation. They more than their military peers, are likely to recognize the distinction between state power and state authority.

Civilian may enter the decision making process in two ways: they may assert their intrinsic authority over the objections of military leaders or they may be invited to participate by the military leadership. While both options may force contestation, the latter course is more likely to lead to substantial overhaul of strategy. Senior military sponsorship of civilian participation will lend civilian input credibility that would be lacking in the case of direct intervention. This dynamic explains the significance of the uniformed statesman in a number of successful counterinsurgency campaigns.

The Dependent Variable: Strategic Choice in Counterinsurgency

Summary

Changes in the independent variables cause variation in the timing, order and extent of organizational search. The parameters of that search will determine the lessons militaries derive from the counterinsurgency experience. This organizational learning takes place on two distinct levels: that of routines or tactics, and that of rules or strategy.

Left to their own devices, militaries will tend to favor exploitation over exploration. This is both a natural organizational response and a reflection of the “self-hiding” nature of performance problems in counterinsurgency. On the level of strategy, militaries will tend to move from small war strategies (Model 1) to political war (Model 2). Militaries generally encounter great difficulty coping with the political aspects of counterinsurgency. Consequently, they are usually content to modify their military model of problem solving rather than replace it.

The Tools of Counterinsurgency

Most militaries make rapid progress at the level of routines and tools. Militaries are adept at improving and modifying existing tactical routines to boost efficiency. They will typically improve mobility, human intelligence and defensive tactics in response to the exigencies of the conflict. This learning is local in origin and is often supported by various ad hoc schools established to disseminate adaptations developed at the local level. Militaries also manage to develop novel routines to address the peculiar problems of counterinsurgency. While some of these are simple extensions of conventional capabilities (e.g. the introduction of helicopters to improve mobility), others are genuinely new. Though there appears to be relatively little conscious attention to the experience of other armies in similar circumstances, and true innovation lags line extensions significantly, professional militaries nevertheless manage to develop a series of tools aimed at influencing the population. These innovations come in the areas of civic action and reconstruction, population resettlement and psychological operations.

Strategies of Counterinsurgency

If the state is to exist, the dominated must obey the authority claimed by the powers that be. When and why do men obey? Upon what inner justifications and upon what external means does this domination rest?¹⁴⁸

Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*

Where militaries struggle and often fail is in the act of assembling these new and existing routines into an effective strategy. The ultimate goal of counterinsurgency is to re-establish a durable political order, one that can survive the end of routine military operations by large bodies of troops. The outbreak of insurgency represents the collapse of the unitary power and authority of the state and the devolution of violence from the state to groups and individuals has set off a Hobbesian “war of all against all.”

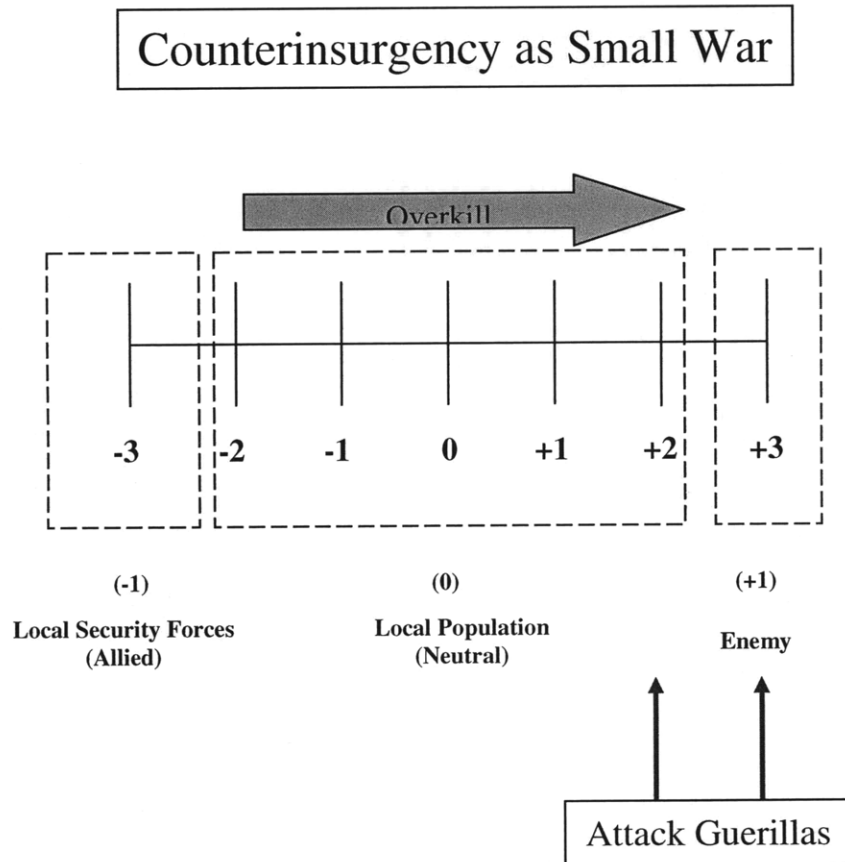
Though it often takes some time for leaders to recognize it, the central task of counterinsurgency is the restoration of the power and authority of the state. To restore that authority leaders must answer Weber’s two questions. When and why do men obey? Upon what inner justifications and upon what external means does this domination rest?

Each of the three strategies described below is organized around a different answer to these questions and a different theory of how to restore “organized obedience” to the state. That theory of victory in turn rests on assumptions about the significance, agency and motivation of the insurgents and the population. Each strategy bears the mark of one or more routines that symbolize these abstract foundations. The content of each strategy sets up tradeoffs between task performance and organizational fit.

¹⁴⁸ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” pp. 1.

Model 1: Counterinsurgency as Small War

Militaries often treat counterinsurgency as a variety of conventional war. While the war is dispersed and is often carried out in populated areas, militaries assume that it is still a struggle in which direct attack on the armed opponent is the shortest path to victory.



This response rests on the implicit assumption that obedience is a product of fear. Men obey the state because the state holds overwhelming power and this power engenders fear. Individuals and groups base their behavior on a cold calculation of the consequences of rash action against a powerful state.

This logic leads militaries to apply overwhelming force to the armed insurgents and their supporters under the assumption that military victory will usher in a new period

of stable order. The presence of military forces and their use against insurgents should convince the population to submit to the authority of the authorities. If the counterinsurgent forces are visibly superior to the insurgents in military terms, then the population should submit to this manifest power. This reliance on conventional measures of guerilla capabilities leads militaries to understate the threat posed by such groups and overstate the likelihood of conventional military victory over them.

The small war response involves on a number of unstated supporting assumptions about the population. First, the insurgents are the center of gravity of the rebellion and the population is a distinctly secondary concern. While it may be wise to avoid wanton destruction of civilians and property, militaries pursuing this model assume that the defeat or destruction of the insurgents and their supporters will restore state authority. Second, the agency of the population is limited; individually as well as collectively, they are assumed to be passive. Third, to the extent that militaries consider the question of the population's motivation, they assume that they will respond to the simple calculus of power.

The routine that best exemplifies Model 1 is large scale cordon and search. In cordon and search operations counterinsurgent forces surround an area in which rebels are believed to be hiding. Once the cordon is in place, the forces comb the area in an effort to apprehend the rebels and their supporters. In theory, such operations should lead to the capture of enemy forces and engender respect for the power of the state. In practice, the operations tend to produce small positive results and antagonize the local population. Actions taken against innocents, damage to property, and the imposition or collective responsibility for guerilla actions tend to increase popular resentment of the

government. Reproduced on a mass scale, such operations neither reduce the total number of guerillas nor produce the desired psychological effects on the population.

The problem is that the simple application of coercive force is an ineffective means of re-establishing the state's monopoly position. Counterinsurgent forces must expend vast resources and time chasing very small numbers of armed opponents. Even when they find them, the collateral damage of search and destroy operations tends to alienate the population rather than impress them.

The Model 1 prescription is quite simple: men obey the state because they fear it and will obey only when that power is overwhelming. The problem of restoring the state is one of maximizing force and applying it against those who oppose the new order. Those who resist the state are destroyed or imprisoned. Those who observe these actions will fear the state and obey it.

Model 2: Counterinsurgency as Political War

Political war (Model 2) rests a different answer to Weber's questions. Men obey the state because they fear its coercive power and desire the material benefits it can provide. Even if sticks alone cannot compel obedience, a clever mix of carrots and sticks can.

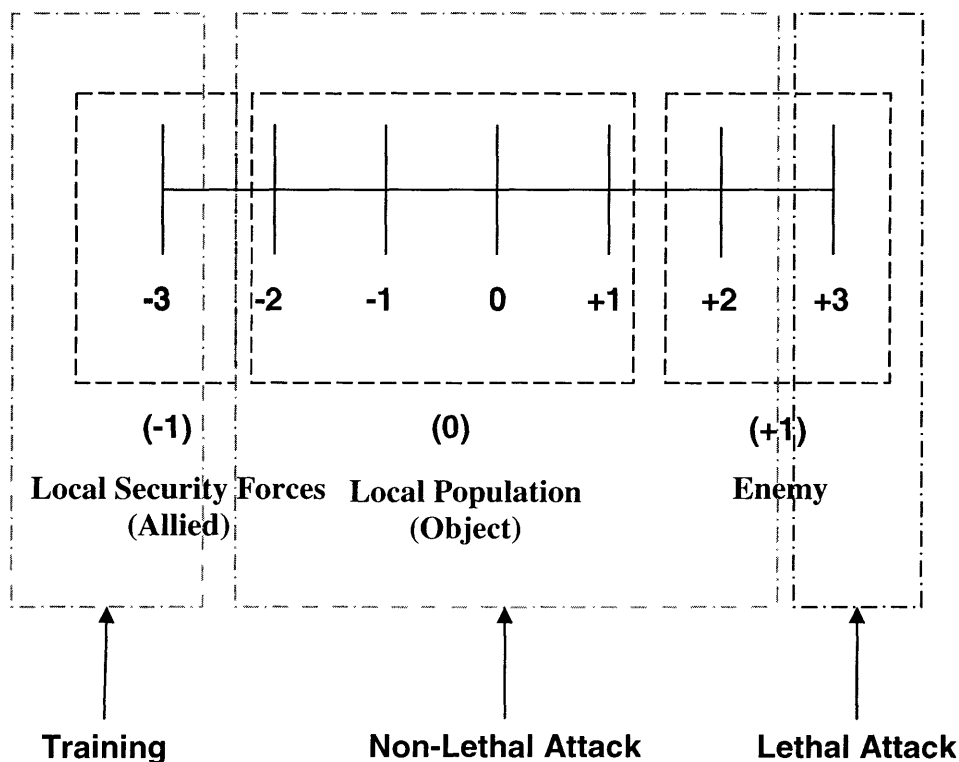
Political war combines a grudging recognition of the importance of political aspects of counterinsurgency with a stubborn defense of the military operational code. Militaries generally adopt this strategy because small war strategies have failed to deliver decisive results on the campaign level. When countless small victories and prolonged escalation fail to reduce or even check the expansion of the guerilla movement, the

military is forced to reexamine its assumptions about the significance of the population and the origins of resistance. While the first instinct may be to attribute increased guerilla strength to foreigners, the puzzle of guerilla regeneration eventually forces most militaries to enter the unfamiliar realm of mass politics.

Political war appears quite different from small war in a number of respects. First, it involves a recognition of the importance of the population in counterinsurgency. Whereas the armed insurgents are clearly the center of gravity in Model 1 strategies, militaries embracing modified strategies single out the population as the center of gravity. Military leaders often redefine the counterinsurgency campaign as a contest to control the population.

To secure control over the population, the military adds new weapons and new targets. While they continue to pursue the insurgents (+3) and their supporters (+2) using military force, the military begins to employ a mix of psychological operations, civic action, and population control to compel the population (-2, -1, 0, +1, +2) to submit. With these new tools comes the need for new measures of effectiveness. Militaries engaged in the civic action and the provision of basic government services begin to measure their progress in terms of the benefits delivered to the population. Militaries attempt to measure popular opinion and to incorporate these considerations into the larger military struggle against the insurgents.

Counterinsurgency as Political War



While the move from small war to political war is a major one, much remains unchanged. While the military considers the population and its sentiments more important, it continues to treat the problem as one of simple compellance. The military assumes that the skillful application of some combination of positive and negative incentives will lead the weaker parties to accept the new order. The relationship between the counterinsurgent forces and the population remains an inherently unequal one: the military imposes a set of clear incentives on a passive population, and the population responds to these incentives based on a logic of unbiased self-interest. If the counterinsurgent forces offer a superior mix of advertising and incentives, then the population is bound to support them.

For all its political trappings, Model 2 still relies heavily on the logic of the military operational code. Militaries react to the unavoidable incorporation of political ideas by redefining politics in their own image. Political conflict, like battle, remains a simple test of strength and power in which victory goes to the stronger party. Militaries can secure peace by bombarding the insurgents and the population with a mix of incentives. Rather than adopting the logic of exchange or bargaining, Model 2 makes politics an extension of war by other means.¹⁴⁹

Two sets of routines are the hallmarks of Model 2: civic action and psychological operations. Civic action involves the provision of public goods to secure the loyalty and appreciation of the population. Civic action may take the form of construction projects or in the provision of basic services such as food, power and water. Military leaders assume that “good works” will produce positive reactions and that this gratitude will decrease support for the insurgents and boost support for the government.

Psychological operations represent an attempt to gain the support of the population through effective advertising. The state uses media to transmit messages that cast the insurgents in a negative light while highlighting the positive image and accomplishments of the state. This implicitly rests on the assumption that lack of support for the government is a function of incomplete information or inaccurate or inarticulate communication of the government’s message.

What military enthusiasm for civic action and psychological operations demonstrates is the belief that a powerful and benevolent state will inevitably command the respect of a passive population. The relationship between the state and the population

¹⁴⁹ Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime 1919-1924* (London: The Harvill Press, 1994), pp. 499.

is still an essentially unequal one in which the state provides incentives and the population reacts according to a simple cost/benefit calculus.

Model 2 brings its own variety of learning trap. Population control is intrinsically coercive; it may be possible to produce submission through force, but it is almost impossible to gauge genuine public opinion when force is present. Without a valid, coincident measure of public sentiment, states and militaries fall back on measures of performance. Rather than trying to measure the political effects of their actions, they measure the political tasks they perform – the number of wells dug, roads built, villages resettled, etc. Reliance on measures of performance in turn leads them to overstate their success in the political dimension.

While Model 2 strategies are generally more effective than Model 1 strategies in suppressing violence, this progress is generally temporary and costly. Populations often resent the strictures placed on them but hesitate to show resistance when the agents of the state are present. Once they have left, the population is often more likely to assist the guerillas than they were prior to the imposition of the “protective” scheme. This is why progress is so costly and open-ended. Model 2 control depends on the permanent, direct administration of the subject population.

Model 2 is often the last stop in military organizational learning. Since it incorporates political considerations while preserving the core problem solving model of the profession, the solution appears more appropriate to the situation and institutionally non-threatening. Once military leaders have acknowledged the nominal centrality of politics, and have redefined politics in ways that are consistent with their model of

problem solving, they are resistant to outside efforts to push further in the direction of political interaction with the population.

Model 3: Counterinsurgency as State Consolidation

Model 3 strategies provide a third answer to the question of why men obey. Over the long run, men obey the state because they accept its authority as legitimate. In order to restore organized obedience to the state, the state must convince local elites and the local population to accept its authority voluntarily. In practical terms, integrated political strategies involve the search for the minimum winning coalition. The state must, through the use of bargaining, assemble a coalition of groups and individuals that will willingly form a bulwark against generalized social violence.

At their core, Model 3 strategies have as their objective the consent of the governed. Where Model 1 and Model 2 rest on the assumption that the populace can be beaten, or in the latter case beaten and bribed,¹⁵⁰ into accepting the new order, Model 3 strategies recognize the importance of consent. Without the consent of some large portion of the population, including many who may have supported or sympathized with the insurgents, the state cannot reconstruct a durable, low cost political order.

The most important insight is that the political consent of some large portion of the population is a functional prerequisite for conflict termination. Military leaders recognize that political consent cannot be obtained simply through the unilateral application of force or the manipulation of positive or negative incentives. Instead, the political solution must involve some level of bargaining between the state and local elites and population. This generally pushes civilian leaders to the forefront, and subordinates

¹⁵⁰ This is Barry Posen's turn of phrase.

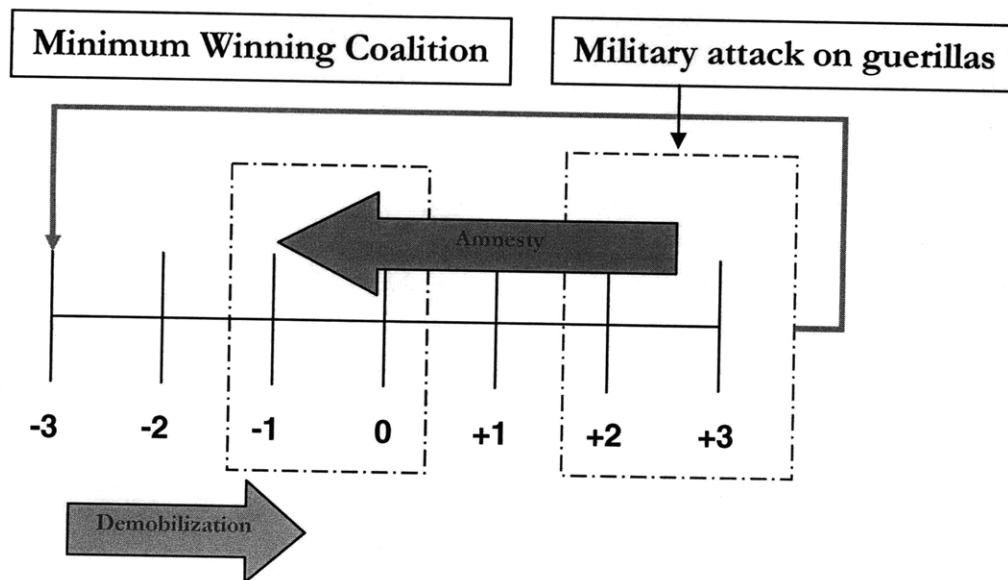
the exercise of military force to the larger political purpose of political reconstruction. The military relinquishes much of its autonomy and control over strategy, and assumes a supporting role in a broader political bargaining process. The military moves from the role of king to the diminished stature of kingmaker.

This shift from the externally imposed obedience of Model 2 to the consensual obedience of Model 3 has profound implications. As Stanley Milgram has noted, the origins, permanence and costs of these two forms of obedience to authority differ in fundamental ways:

While people will comply with a source of social control under coercion (as when a gun is aimed at them), the nature of obedience under such circumstances is limited to direct surveillance. When the gunman leaves, or when his capacity for sanctions is eliminated, obedience stops. In the case of voluntary obedience to a legitimate authority, the principal sanctions for disobedience come from within the person. They are not dependent upon coercion, but stem from the individual's sense of commitment to his role. In this sense, *there is an internalized basis for his obedience, not merely an external one.*¹⁵¹

In the context of state consolidation, this “internalized obedience” makes the restoration of stability possible at an acceptable cost. Whereas obedience under Model 2 strategies depends on the costly and open ended maintenance of large numbers of security forces, Model 3 strategies use consent and internalized obedience to facilitate a return to low cost governance.

¹⁵¹ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), pp. 140-141.



One signature routine of Model 3 strategies is amnesty. Amnesty involves the conversion of onetime opponents into members of the state coalition. Under amnesty programs, the state offers the individual or group safe treatment and political rights within the new order. In return, the individual or group agrees to accept the authority of the state and abandon extralegal violence as a tool of political competition. Amnesty will not work without powerful positive and negative incentives. But the presence of these incentives alone is generally insufficient to cause individuals or groups to willingly submit. Writing on his experience in turning onetime guerillas into counter-guerilla fighters, Frank Kitson highlighted the role of political ideas and rationales in securing individual loyalty to the state:

...three separate factors have to be brought into play in order to make a man shift his allegiance. In the first place he must be given an incentive which strong enough to make him want to do so. This is the carrot. Then he must be made to realize that failure will result in something very unpleasant happening to him. This is the stick. Thirdly he must be given a reasonable opportunity of proving to himself and to his friends that there is nothing fundamentally dishonorable about his action. Some people consider that the carrot and stick provide all that is necessary, but I am sure that many people will refuse the one and face the other, if by doing otherwise they lose their self-respect. On the other hand few people will choose the harder course if they think that both are equally consistent with their ideals.¹⁵²

¹⁵² Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, pp. 47-48.

Once an individual has chosen to switch sides, the source of control becomes internal rather than purely external. This is the fundamental step, which, on the much larger scale of populations and elites, is the process that must take place in order for the state to restore its claim to authority.

One objection to Model 3 strategy is that negotiation and state consolidation are matters for the government and not the military. According to this line of reasoning, militaries “fail” to adopt Model 3 strategies because it is not their job to do so. In a normative sense, this is correct. In the context of interstate war, it is the civilian government that controls the policy aims and any eventual negotiation. In counterinsurgency, this division of labor is less distinct. Military leaders are often the de facto stewards of both strategy and policy, particularly at the local level. Whether this is the result of civilian abdication or military usurpation, the result is essentially the same. The military commander is the de facto sovereign of the occupied territory, and his actions will dictate the terms of the political competition. As the would be monopolist on the legitimate use of violence, the commander cannot extract himself from local politics. He can only decide if and how he chooses to interact with the population.

For this reason, an understanding and acceptance of Model 3 assumptions is central to state success in the restoration of state authority. A military leader who recognizes and accepts the limits inherent in Model 1 and Model 2 can advise the civil authorities of these limits and increase the likelihood of cooperation.¹⁵³ By contrast, the

¹⁵³ The clearest example of this is General Templer’s interaction with Oliver Lyttelton and Winston Churchill in early 1952. Templer clearly recognized the political object and the importance of soliciting input from the civilian government in London (Source: Sir Gerlad Templer, “[The task in Malaya]: minute by Sir G Templer to Mr Churchill, PREM 11/639, 12 Jan 1952,” in A.J. Stockwell (ed.), *Malaya: Part II: The Communist Insurrection, 1948-1953* (London: HMSO, 1995), British Documents on the End of Empire, Series B, Vol. 3, pp. 361).

military leader who restricts his activities to the military sphere of Model 1 can always scuttle civilian negotiation. Successful implementation of Model 3 strategies always requires military deference to civil authority; in many cases it requires active advice from the military leaders who are the de facto sovereigns of the territory.

Men obey the state because they accept its authority. The restoration of state authority depends on the assembly of a minimum, winning coalition of elites and individuals who accept the new order. This solution may involve violence, but it is violence applied with the final reconciliation in mind.

Changes in Counterinsurgent Strategy

When resources are abundant and the military is free to dictate strategy, the natural progression is to begin with a Model 1 response. Only as this proves inadequate is the military likely to move to a Model 2 strategy. Under these conditions, militaries are unlikely to embrace Model 3 strategies. Faced with a choice between a model that incorporates politics without upsetting core models, and one that subordinates military action to political constraints, the military is likely to choose the former.

Unlearning

Moves from one strategy to another involve some level of unlearning.¹⁵⁴ The adoption of new strategies, as opposed to the incorporation of new routines, inevitably entails the overthrow of existing ideas about how to relate actions to the desired ends. The burden of unlearning varies significantly across the three strategies in question.

¹⁵⁴ William H. Starbuck, "Unlearning Ineffective or Obsolete Technologies," *International Journal of Technology Management*, Vol. 11, 1996, pp. 725-737.

Militaries find it easiest to embrace conventional military response, and often develop Model 2 strategies in response to prolonged military stalemate. Militaries find political strategies much harder to understand and intrinsically unappealing.

Moves into conventional military response are clearly the easiest. Conventional military response is a straightforward application of the tenets of the military operational code to small scale violence of counterinsurgency. The jump from Model 1 to Model 2 is more substantial. It involves the development and incorporation of completely new tools necessary to influence the population. The coordination of psychological operations, resettlement, and civic action and existing military actions demands a substantial overhaul of the planning process and the daily routine of headquarters and field units. More important, Model 2 involves a shift in the perception of the local population. A group that was once considered a bystander is now, at least nominally, the real prize in the insurgent/counter-insurgent struggle.

What makes the development of political war strategies substantially easier is that Model 2 retains most of the military's core ideas about how to accomplish its objectives. Like the Model 1, Model 2 assumes that the new tools - psychological, economic and social – can be applied in much the same way as conventional weapons. The military can treat incentives as non-lethal munitions, applying incentives on a passive target in the expectation that such bombardment will force the target to submit in the face of superior force. Political concerns are incorporated without challenging the basic theory of victory.

The leap from Model 2 to Model 3 is by far the most challenging. Model 3 strategies replace the core problem solving construct of the professional military with a foreign and unsatisfying theory of political coalition building. Once leaders recognize

that they need the consent of the governed to re-establish a stable and effective state, the one way application of positive and negative incentives is obviously inadequate approach to the problem. Instead of acting as “managers of violence” or managers of incentives, they must become involved in a more complex game of two way exchange and bargaining. Integrated political strategies also involve the fundamental subordination of military action to political strategy. The reduced prominence and severely restricted autonomy inherent in the new model are repellant to most military professionals. For these reasons, militaries are unlikely to adopt these approaches in the absence of strong civilian pressures and resource constraints.

Interwar Stability

When the counterinsurgency campaign is over, militaries will tend to embark on a campaign of “purge and prevent.” The purge will involve the selective retention and rejection of routines and strategies developed over the course of the war. In many instances, this will be accompanied by attempts to avoid future involvement in counterinsurgency.

Routines are screened on the basis of their compatibility with conventional military logic and the organizational interests. Routines that have proven useful and pass both tests are the most likely to be retained; those that clash with either set of motives will be discarded.

The pattern is most striking on the level of strategy. Here the overwhelming tendency is to revert to Model 1. While militaries may retain some routines and even some understanding of Model 2 strategy, they are likely to expunge Model 3 strategies

and concepts almost immediately. The foreign nature of the theories and beliefs involved, combined with the organizational implications of such formulas, make them easy candidates for rejection. Integrated political strategy is an unstable equilibrium in the interwar period.

There is a deep irony of the purge and prevent phenomenon. What militaries are most likely to retain in the wake of counterinsurgency campaigns is what they need the least – improved routines for the application of force a new tools for creating positive and negative incentives at the population level. What is actively discarded is what is needed most – a theory of victory that combines the tools of the state in a way that is effective in solving the problem of state disintegration.

Predictions

The theory's predictions can be broken into two parts. The first is the prediction of professional similarity. Most of the existing works on counterinsurgency suggest that differences in experience and culture produce variation in organizational learning. If this is true, we should expect to see wide variation in strategic choice and interwar retention. This study, by contrast, argues that militaries, in spite of these differences, respond in remarkably similar fashion. Separated by language, national and organizational culture, history, experience and circumstance, these militaries struggle with the same cognitive and bureaucratic barriers. The study of counterinsurgency has been dominated by “splitters” – those who have emphasized the particulars of specific cases and looked for causal explanations for learning at the unit level. I argue that this has been a mistake.

The most striking aspect of organizational learning in counterinsurgency is the similarity of military response across national boundaries.

The second test of the theory comes in the form of more specific questions and testable hypotheses. In each of the empirical cases, we will ask the same four questions. First, are the dominant patterns of intrawar and interwar learning present? Second, can these patterns be traced to the operational code and bureaucratic interest and the associated causal mechanisms? Third, do changes in the independent variables explain deviation from the dominant patterns? Fourth, do the causal mechanisms explain the connection between changes in the independent and dependent variables?

The Dominant Intrawar Pattern

Militaries will respond to insurgency with small war strategies (Model 1); they will attempt to extinguish resistance by attacking their armed opponents and intimidating the population. These operations will generate small victories and campaign stalemate. Militaries will respond to this paradox with exploitation. They will refine existing Model 1 strategies, increase the level of resources employed, and relax restrictions on the use of force. The exploitation phase is generally the longest period in a counterinsurgency campaign; militaries will pursue exploitation until they run out of resources or have failed to resolve the campaign stalemate over a period of months or years.

Having exhausted the possibilities of Model 1, militaries will shift from small war (Model 1) to political war (Model 2). The focus of operations will shift from attack on the guerillas to control of the population. This new phase will see the application of new tools including civic action, psychological operations and coercive population control

(resettlement and detention). While these measures will tend to suppress violence, they will create a new, high cost stalemate. The maintenance of order will demand enormous reserves of manpower and an indefinite commitment to the direct rule of subject populations.

Dominant Interwar Pattern

Militaries that emerge from counterinsurgent campaigns will engage in an interwar purge. Retention will be highest at the level of tactical routines. Militaries will catalogue and disseminate the tactical lessons of the past campaign. The routines most likely to be retained are those with clear applicability to interstate war: “dual use” routines. Retention will be much lower at the level of strategy. While they may have employed Model 2 or Model 3 strategies in the preceding campaign, and these strategies may have contributed to campaign success, they will tend to jettison Models 2 and 3 and revert to Model 1. The strategic purge means that militaries will enter subsequent counterinsurgent campaigns with a collection of tactical routines and Model 1 strategy.

Deviation from the Dominant Patterns

The military operational code and bureaucratic interests produce the dominant patterns of intrawar and interwar learning dysfunction. Militaries will deviate from these patterns in response to changes in task performance, civilian participation and resources. These changes will be expressed through specific causal mechanisms.

The influence of changes in these variables is asymmetric; it takes far more energy to push a military up the strategic spectrum (Model 1 → 2 or Model 2 → Model

3) than it does to push it down (Model 3 → Model 1). The military operational code and bureaucratic interests act like an elastic band. The farther counterinsurgent strategy is pulled away from the Model 1 anchor, the greater the resistance and the energy necessary to maintain such a strategy. Even small reductions in the forces supporting Model 2 or Model 3 strategy may lead the military to snap back to its Model 1 default. To borrow the terminology of economics, strategic choice is sticky upward but not downward.

Task Pressure

When task pressure is high, as in the case of domestic insurgency, militaries will behave as simple problem solvers. While they may struggle with the mismatch between counterinsurgency and existing organizational beliefs and preferences, militaries will tend to focus on the problem of counterinsurgency and ignore parochial concerns. In cases of limited war or expeditionary counterinsurgency, moderate task pressure will lead militaries to balance the task utility of strategies and routines against their implications for the organizational health of the institution; organizational search will be both local and biased. Militaries will seek to preserve existing beliefs and belief systems and will explore new solutions in the order of bureaucratic fit. Those strategies that are most consistent with the military operational code, and most consistent with organizational interests will be implemented first; strategies that involve radical overhaul of the operational code or clash with core bureaucratic interests will be implemented only as a last resort. Militaries will prefer Model 1 to Model 2 and strongly prefer Model 2 to Model 3.

In peacetime, when task pressure is low or non-existent, parochial interests will be ascendant. The retention or development of counterinsurgency routines and strategies will be depend primarily on their fit with the organizational interests of the military

In short, task pressure is the switching mechanism that regulates the influence of the two casual constants on the patterns of intrawar and interwar learning. Variation in task pressure over time will determine the relative influence of external task pressures and internal bureaucratic ones.

Task Performance

Task performance is a categorical variable with four values: success, stalemate, trend failure, and episodic failure. In each case, the propensity to engage in search is a function of perceived rather than objective performance. When the military considers a strategy successful, it is unlikely to search for alternatives. When strategy produces stalemate - the absence of success – the military is more likely to explore alternatives. When strategy produces negative trends, such as increasing violence or increased enemy strength, then the military is still more likely to engage in search. The probability of search reaches it maximum in the case of episodic failure: a major battlefield defeat or equivalent reverse.

While failure is generally a necessary precondition for serious organizational search,¹⁵⁵ its influence on the path of that search is indeterminate. When militaries recognize failure, they are likely to explore alternative strategies. When performance is

¹⁵⁵ An important exception to this rule is the influence of positive resource shocks. In Indochina and Thailand, a sudden influx of resources was enough to propel a military backward from Model 2 or Model 3 strategies to Model 1. Even in the absence of trend or episodic failure, the expanded availability of manpower and materiel encouraged military leaders to move from Model 2 or Model 3 solutions to Model 1 small war.

mixed or ambiguous, they are likely to channel resources into exploitation and escalation rather than exploration or search.

Failure is an equally limited guide in interwar behavior. Campaign failure may stimulate search but cannot guarantee effective search or even effective retention in the interwar period. Militaries respond to campaign failure by shedding counterinsurgency capabilities in order to avoid involvement in future counterinsurgency conflicts.

Civilian Participation

Increased civilian participation in strategic choice and performance evaluation accelerates search and increases the chances that Model 3 strategies will be considered. Civilian participation in decisions on the use of force is an important check on the counter-productive use of violence. Changes in civilian participation are expressed through three causal mechanisms: deliberate choice, parallel evaluation, and norms of politics exchange. Increased civilian participation increases the likelihood that a military's initial response will be subjected to careful scrutiny. Deliberate choice reduces the likelihood of reflexive Model 1 response and increases the likelihood that Model 2 or Model 3 will be explored. Once a strategy has been chosen, high civilian participation ensures that there will be a parallel evaluation of performance. Civilians bring different measures of effectiveness than their military peers and are less likely to fall into Model 1 or Model 2 learning traps. Parallel evaluation encourages early search by accelerating the recognition of Model 1 and Model 2 strategic failure. Increased civilian participation also brings the norms of political exchange into counterinsurgency strategy. Civilian politicians accustomed to logrolling and other norms of political exchange are more

likely to see solutions outside the simple application of coercive force. These norms increase the likelihood that strategic search will result in Model 3 strategy.

Resource Abundance

Resource abundance will delay the search for new solutions to counterinsurgency and encourage an extended period of exploitation. Resource scarcity, whether in manpower or capital, will tend to accelerate search and steer it into less coercive strategies. Resource abundance or scarcity can influence the course of adaptation at any point in the counterinsurgency timeline. Resource abundance or scarcity in the opening phase of a campaign may influence initial strategic choice. Sharp changes or even the expectation of sharp changes in resource levels during the course of a campaign may induce major shifts in strategy. Sharp reductions in resources may force militaries to explore less resource intensive and more political strategies; by contrast, major surges in resources may lead militaries to return to more familiar and comfortable military responses to counterinsurgency.

Resource scarcity influences the learning process through four casual mechanisms: budget constraints, resource regression, bureaucratic influence, and factor endowment effects. Budget constraints narrow the choices available and drive militaries away from Models 1 and 2. When militaries lack the resources to pursue Model 1 or Model 2 strategies, the budget constraint can force militaries in the direction of Model 3. Resource scarcity, measured relative to the scale of the threat and the subject population, must be severe enough to render a Model 1 response infeasible. Resource regression refers to the opposite effect: the power of positive resource shocks to drive militaries

down the strategic spectrum. Abundant manpower or military materiel may tempt militaries to abandon even successful Model 2 and particularly Model 3 solutions in favor of the test of battle. Resource abundance also often alters the bureaucratic balance of power, amplifying the voice of military leaders. Increased bureaucratic influence on the part of the military decreases the likelihood that Model 3 strategies will be pursued. Conversely, resource scarcity enables civilian leaders to maintain their relative bureaucratic influence, increasing the likelihood of Model 3 choice.

The impact of resource abundance also depends on the composition of the resource flows. When resource shocks come in the form of increased manpower, this increases the likelihood of Model 1 or Model 2 strategy. When resource flows come in the form of military capital equipment, the likelihood of Model 1 strategy increases. When the resource shock comes in the form of financial aid rather than manpower or capital, then the likelihood of Model 3 strategy increases. When resources come in the form of military capital equipment, the specific tools provided will exert an influence on strategic choice. For instance, the provision of tanks and landing craft will encourage militaries to pursue Model 1 strategies that enable them to use these new tools.

Interaction Effects: Civilian Participation and Resource Abundance

Under certain circumstances, changes in resource levels and civilian participation will pull in opposite directions. When resources increase in environments of rising civilian participation, the likelihood of civil-military crisis increases. Military leaders respond to resource abundance by leaning in the direction of Model 1 escalation; civilian leaders often advocate Model 3 alternatives. This combination is explosive and sets the

stage for a test of power between civilian and military leaders for control of counterinsurgent strategy. When resources and civilian participation fall in tandem, the effect on strategic choice depends on the magnitude of the negative resource shock. If it is great enough to represent a binding constraint, then the likelihood of Model 3 strategy rises. If, on the other hand, there remain sufficient resources to pursue Model 1 options the likelihood of Model 3 choice is much smaller.

	Causal Mechanisms	Hypotheses
Military Operational Code (C1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illusion of familiarity • Learning trap (1) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bounded awareness 2. Small victories 3. Exploitation before exploration reflex • Learning trap (2) 	<p>H1: Symptoms of insurgency → misclassification as small war → patterned response (Model 1)</p> <p>H2: Model 1 → mixed feedback → overweighting small victories, underweighting political costs → positive self-evaluation of performance</p> <p>H3: Small victories + campaign stalemate → exploitation (process refinement + escalation)</p>
Bureaucratic Interest (C2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selective Purge 	<p>H4: Model 2 → clear measures of performance and ambiguous political effects → fixation on MOP → perceived success → reinforced attachment to Model 2</p> <p>H5: Militaries will retain routines, particularly “dual use” routines</p>
Task Pressure (IV 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switching mechanism: Salience of Beliefs and Preferences 	<p>H6: Militaries will purge Model 2 and particularly Model 3 strategies</p> <p>H7: If TP = 0 (Peacetime), Then Bureaucratic Interest Primary, MOC Secondary</p> <p>H8: If TP = 1 (Expeditionary Counterinsurgency), Then MOC Primary, Bureaucratic Interest Secondary</p> <p>H9: If TP = 2 (Domestic Counterinsurgency), Then MOC only</p>
Task Performance (IV 2)		<p>H10: Episodic failure → ↑ P(Search)</p> <p>H11: Trend failure → ↑ P(Search)</p> <p>H12: Stalemate → ↑ P(Search)</p> <p>H13: $P(\text{Search}_{\text{Episodic Failure}}) > P(\text{Search}_{\text{Trend Failure}}) > P(\text{Search}_{\text{Stalemate}})$</p>

Civilian Participation (IV 3)

- **Deliberate choice** H14: \uparrow Civilian Participation $\rightarrow \uparrow$ P(deliberate evaluation of responses) $\rightarrow \downarrow$ P(Model 1), \uparrow P(Model 2 or Model 3)
- **Parallel evaluation/audit** H15: \uparrow Civilian Participation \rightarrow alternative interpretation of performance $\rightarrow \uparrow$ P(early exploration), \downarrow P(exploitation)
- **Norms of political exchange** H16: Political experience \rightarrow norms of political exchange $\rightarrow \uparrow$ P(Model 3)

Resources (IV 4)

- **Budget constraint** H17: \downarrow Resources $\rightarrow \downarrow$ P(Model 1, Model 2), \uparrow P(Model 3)
- **Resource regression** H18: \uparrow Resources $\rightarrow \uparrow$ P(Model 1, Model 2), \downarrow P(Model 3)
- **Bureaucratic influence** H19: \uparrow Resources $\rightarrow \uparrow$ relative military influence in strategy $\rightarrow \uparrow$ P(Model 1, Model 2)
H20: \downarrow Resources $\rightarrow \downarrow$ relative military influence $\rightarrow \downarrow$ P(Model 1, 2), \uparrow P(Model 3)
- **Factor endowment effects** H21: \uparrow Labor $\rightarrow \uparrow$ P(Model 1, Model 2)
H22: \uparrow Capital $\rightarrow \uparrow$ P(Model 1)
H23: \uparrow Cash $\rightarrow \uparrow$ P(Model 3)
H24: Conventional equipment $\rightarrow \uparrow$ P(Model 1)
H25: (\uparrow Resources) + (\uparrow Civilian Participation) $\rightarrow \uparrow$ P(civil-military crisis)
H26: (\downarrow Resources) + (\downarrow Civilian Participation) $\rightarrow \uparrow$ P(Model 3)

Interaction Effects

Part II

Testing the Theory

Part II

Testing the Theory

Research Design

Part II of this study tests the theory developed in Chapter 2 using a series of historical cases. The research design comes in two sections. The first is a test of the internal validity of the theory. Does the theory explain the observed behavior within the confines of three core cases? The second section examines challenges to external validity of the theory. Do the generalizations made in the theory and evaluated in the three core cases apply to the larger population of counterinsurgency cases? Together, these sections test the power and explanatory range of the theory.

Tests of Internal Validity: Three Cases in Time Series

In the first section, we examine the behavior of a single state over a series of historical cases. The first and third cases are counterinsurgency campaigns; the second case is the interwar period that separates them. By examining the evolution of counterinsurgency strategy over this series of three cases, we can effectively isolate the problems of intrawar and interwar organizational learning in a single national tradition.

Within each case, we seek to do three things. First, we trace the evolution of strategic choice from the initial response through subsequent change or stasis. What explains strategic choice at key decision nodes? Why do militaries choose to pursue strategic search? Why, in other instances, do they respond to these opportunities with the exploitation of existing strategies? What is the structure of strategic search when it

occurs? Second, we examine whether the dominant intrawar or interwar patterns are present and can be traced to the causal influences and mechanisms laid out in the theory. Third, we examine the influence of changes in the independent variables on strategic choice. Do changes in the independent variables result in the predicted changes in strategy? Do the causal mechanisms associated with each independent variable explain the connection between this variation and changes in strategy?

The three case series also enables us to examine the influence of task pressure on strategic choice. The transition from war to peace highlights the effect of falling task pressure. Does the disappearance of task pressure in the interwar period lead to the expected patterns of retention and rejection? The transitions from the interwar period to the second campaign demonstrate the relative influence of past experience on successive tests. Do militaries pick up where they left off in the late stages of the last counterinsurgency campaign or do they revert to their defaults?

Tests of External Validity

While the three core cases offer an opportunity to test the theory in considerable depth, there are inherent limits to any qualitative, small n design. Even if the theory explains outcomes in the three cases, there is a possibility that the sample is biased. The question remains whether the sample is representative of the larger population of counterinsurgency cases, or whether the patterns observed and theories proposed are limited to that particular sample.

The most robust test of the generalizability of the theory is “out of sample” prediction or retrodiction. Does the theory explain the behavior of militaries in other

counterinsurgency cases? While this is the fundamental test of any theory, it places the burden of testing on the skeptical reader. There are at least two alternative ways to demonstrate the external validity of the small n design.¹⁵⁶ The first is the large n quantitative design. By examining a much larger number of cases and coding them in a standardized fashion, it may be possible to test the statistical relationships between the independent and dependent variables. There are two problems inherent in this approach: coding and compression. In order to perform quantitative tests such as regression in the social sciences, it is frequently necessary to transform qualitative phenomena into quantitative data. This coding process introduces significant bias; the researcher's coding decisions can influence the apparent results of the quantitative tests. What makes this so pernicious is the scale of the barriers to test/retest reliability. In order to evaluate the validity of the theories developed with large n, regression, the outside observer must invest considerable time in auditing the data set in its entirety. In many instances, the process of coding may introduce as much or more bias than the sample bias it was designed to offset. Even when coding is relatively unbiased, the increase in the number of cases forces the researcher to compress complex, qualitative data. This compression may lead the researcher to filter out causally relevant data, raising the likelihood of omitted variable bias or spurious correlation. We may discard information that offers alternative explanations of the observed phenomena, or we may overstate the degree to which the chosen parameters explain the outcome. When historical cases or complex

¹⁵⁶ As Campbell and Stanley note, the problem of external validity is intrinsically open ended. We can increase our confidence in a theory by expanding the case set or developing more elaborate quasi-experimental designs, but the explanatory range of the theory can seldom be conclusively established (Source: Donald T. Campbell, Julian C. Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), pp. 5).

social interactions are reduced to a handful of numerical codes, it becomes very difficult for the audience to evaluate the validity of the theory relative to alternative theories.

One alternative to large n, quantitative analysis is the inclusion of shadow cases. These shorter cases may be used to evaluate specific challenges to the external validity of the theory. While the shadow cases may lack the level of detail and in case variation of the core cases, the level of compression is far lower than in large n regression. The researcher can select cases whose attributes allow him to test for omitted variables. This is the approach I have taken here. By examining two British and one Thai case, I examine several alternative explanations for the patterns of behavior seen in the core French cases.

Case Selection

The core cases were chosen based on three criteria: control, variation, and historical importance.¹⁵⁷ The selection of three French cases control for a number of factors that would otherwise be variable: national culture, organizational culture, organizational familiarity with past cases, etc. The French cases also offer substantial within case and cross-case variation on the independent and dependent variables. The series of cases demonstrate the effects of large swings in the independent variables: task pressure, task performance, civilian participation and resource abundance. The richness of the historical data available on these cases makes it possible to test the theory against the alternative explanations proposed in Chapter 1. Over the course of two decades, under conditions of falling resources, and loosening strictures on the use of force, the

¹⁵⁷ Alexander L. George, Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 82-83; Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 77-88.

French tested Model 1 twice and failed. Only in 1957 did they abandon this path and seek an answer in Model 2 population control. The French counterinsurgency campaigns of this period are also historically important. French strategic choices set the stage for domestic, political upheavals in Vietnam, Algeria and France itself.

The shadow cases have been chosen with similar attention to control and variation. Each, however, has been chosen to address a specific challenge or challenges to the generalizability of the theory. The British cases are useful because they allow us to control for a number of structural factors (expeditionary counterinsurgencies, historical period, and colonial transitions) and isolate the effects of national and organizational culture. The conventional wisdom in most studies of counterinsurgency is that the British are more adept at counterinsurgency than the other, Western powers. If the British respond differently and more effectively to the challenge of counterinsurgency, then these differences in initial response, intrawar adaptation, and interwar retention should be visible in the British cases. If on the other hand, shared professional beliefs and preferences explain the dominant patterns of organizational learning, then we should expect to see similar behavior in the British and French cases. Furthermore, the pairing of Palestine and Malaya affords us an opportunity to examine the influence of campaign success and failure on subsequent behavior. Did failure in Palestine have a discernably different effect on subsequent behavior than the success in Malaya?

The Thai case tests a number of other challenges. The case involves a small, Asian state waging a domestic counterinsurgency. As such, it helps test two alternative explanations for British and French behavior. The first alternative is that French and British responses are products of some larger, Western tradition of conventional, great

power war. If this is true, we might expect to see a different response by a small Asian power with little or no experience in modern, conventional warfare. The second explanation is that expeditionary counterinsurgency, particularly in the era of postwar decolonization, was essentially unwinnable. The British and the French were unable to pursue Model 3 alternatives because nationalism prevented compromise. In a domestic insurgency, where the counterinsurgent and insurgent are co-ethnics, and where the counterinsurgent understands the political landscape, he should respond differently and move towards Model 3 more rapidly. If either of these alternative explanations are valid, we should expect to see major differences between French and British behavior on the one hand and Thai behavior on the other. If the Thai response closely resembles that of the two Western armies, and supports the predictions of the theory, then we should be more confident that it is broadly generalizable.

Internal Structure of the Cases

All six cases examined in this study are, in the terminology of Alexander George, “structured, focused comparisons.”¹⁵⁸ Their structure is a function of the common set of questions posed. The overriding question in each case is simple: what explains patterns and variations in strategic choice in counterinsurgency? Four more specific questions flow from this. First, are the dominant intrawar and interwar patterns predicted in the theory present in each case? Do militaries respond to insurgency with Model 1, exploit this strategy for a prolonged period of time, and then adopt Model 2? Do militaries respond to the transition from war to peace by purging Model 2 and Model 3 strategies and retaining tactical routines? Second, if the dominant patterns are present, can they be

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., George, Bennett, pp. 67.

traced to the military operational code, bureaucratic interests and the causal mechanisms associated with them? Third, do changes in the independent variables explain deviation from the dominant patterns? Fourth, do changes in the independent variables operate through the causal mechanisms proposed in the theory?

The cases are focused on the evolution of counterinsurgent strategy; as such they are not fully rounded histories of each conflict, but analytical narratives designed to test the theory and its leading alternatives. I have consciously minimized the role of strategic interaction between the insurgent and the counterinsurgent. Except in those instances where insurgent actions played a decisive role in influencing strategic choice, I have sought to hold insurgent behavior constant and examine the adaptive problem through the eyes of the counterinsurgent.

As in any piece of qualitative social science, the decision of what to include and what to exclude is an act of judgment. An account that seeks to include all relevant data will overwhelm the reader and defeat the attempt to draw specific, theoretical comparisons across a series of historical episodes. An account that is too narrowly focused, that excludes significant portions of data on the grounds that they do not bear directly on the predictions of the theory, runs the risk of overstating the validity of the theory and excluding residual variation.¹⁵⁹ In recent decades, qualitative social science has erred on the side of excessive focus. While this has often been done in the pursuit of parsimony, excessive focus has often become an excuse for excluding data that either do not fit or actively contradict the theory. Instead of presenting data in an unbiased fashion and offering the audience an opportunity to judge the theory against the data and against alternative explanations, many authors have reported only the data that support their

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., George, Bennett, pp. 93.

proposed theory and excluded the rest. This data scrubbing, nominally performed in the interests of focus, has diluted the explanatory power of those theories and deprived the skeptical reader of the data necessary to make informed judgments of their absolute and relative validity.

In this study, I have erred on the side of inclusion. I have sought to provide an unbiased and historically rich account of the evolution of counterinsurgent strategy. I have focused my accounts on the problem of strategic choice. Consequently, the empirical chapters focus on the military's initial response to insurgency, its decisions to exploit initial strategies or explore alternatives, and the structure and results of strategic search.¹⁶⁰ Rather than simply report those pieces of data that support my theory, or restrict the account to a catalogue the values of the variables and mechanisms, I have included sufficient historical detail to support alternative interpretations of these events. If I have erred on the side of inclusion, it has been deliberate. Faced with a tradeoff between unbiased and less focused reporting and the interested or unintentional exclusion of causally relevant data, I have chosen the former.

Each case has certain common elements. The chapters open with a summary table breaks each campaign into a series of phases. The transitions between phases are defined by key decision nodes: points at which militaries clearly choose either to search for new strategy or to exploit an existing one. The table also records the values of the independent and dependent variables and a list of the operational innovations developed in that phase. Operational innovations are included for two reasons. First, they serve as

¹⁶⁰ King, Keohane and Verba's propose two guidelines for the process of summarizing historical data. First, historical "summaries should focus on the outcomes we wish to describe or explain." Second, such summaries "must simplify the information at our disposal." (Source: Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 54-55).

objective markers of the prevailing strategy. Militaries pursuing Model 1 strategies tend to develop routines that maximize mobility and firepower; militaries pursuing Model 2 strategies tend to develop new tools including information operations, resettlement, and civic action. The presence or absence of these markers provides support for the coding of strategy in each phase. Second, they highlight the tradeoffs between operational innovation and strategic search. Much of the existing academic literature on military innovation has focused on strategic or doctrinal innovation; tactical and operational level adaptation has been treated as a separate and subordinate issue. This study argues that operational innovation and strategic search are competitive goods. The exploitation of existing strategies competes with exploration for the finite resources and attention of the organization.

The coding of counterinsurgent strategies raises three separate issues. First, the three models developed in the theory are ideal types. As such, we should expect to see some variation in the expression of these models across the historical cases. Second, changes in counterinsurgent strategy are seldom as abrupt and unanimous as the ideal typology would suggest. More often than not, strategic search is the result of perceived failure of an existing strategy. In the absence of clear, episodic failure, militaries are likely to experiment with elements of a new strategy before they implement it in full. Strategic choice is seldom unanimous. Different factions within the state and within the military may propose alternative solutions to the same perceived failure or stalemate. Even when a decision has been reached, senior commanders must often impose the new strategies over the objections of subordinate commanders and skeptical civilian audiences. In an environment where a theater commander announces a change from

Model 1 to Model 2 strategy, certain subordinate commanders may continue to pursue Model 1 strategies. As a result, the coding of strategy in any given phase is at best a measure of central tendency – the best estimate of the prevailing, theater strategy at that point in time. While the case studies document the gaps between theater strategy and the conduct of local commanders, the coding of strategy tends to overweight the theater strategy vis-à-vis de facto local strategy.

Third, some strategies may contain elements of more than one ideal type. This is most often the case in transitions between Models 1 and 2; the shift from small war to political war may be more gradual than the categorical coding might suggest. During General Salan's tenure in Indochina, the French military remained focused on the Model 1 problem of defeating the Viet Minh army but launched a series of Model 2 experiments aimed at overcoming the abject failure of pacification in Tonkin. To code strategy in this period as either Model 1 or Model 2 would alternatively understate or overstate the degree of change in theater strategy. I have sought to address these issues through fractional coding. In the case of Indochina, I have coded the strategy as an average of the two ideal types – a strategy of 1.5. In short, fractional coding, where it appears, is a conscious attempt to capture significant variation that falls short of the categorical boundaries.¹⁶¹ The methodologically cleaner but analytically weaker alternative would be to ignore significant changes that fall short of these boundaries.

The core and shadow cases are structurally similar; both are designed to answer the same basic set of questions and hypotheses. What separates them is the level of

¹⁶¹ One alternative would have been to code the strategies as integers and provide a supplementary indication of command bias. If strategy is grounded in one ideal type but has begun to move in the direction of another, then the strategy might be scored as the base Model with an upward or downward bias. Using the same Indochina example, Salan's strategy could be coded as Model 1 strategy with an upward bias.

historical detail and the basis for selection. The core cases include more historical detail in order to examine within case variation and establish the internal validity of the theory. The shadow cases, by contrast, seek to address specific, plausible challenges to the external validity of the theory.

As noted earlier, the empirical data provided in the three core cases and three shadow cases are at best a preliminary test of the internal and external validity of the theory proposed in Chapter 2. The ultimate test of the theory is its observed fit to cases outside the test sets provided here. If the theory explains observed patterns of learning in other cases of counterinsurgency, then the theory will have proven its utility. If it fails the out of sample test, no number of instrumentally chosen supplementary cases can salvage it.

Data and Analysis

In this study, I have broken the process of theory testing into two parts: the presentation of historical data and the evaluation of the fit between the theory and those data. In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I present the data in the form of detailed, analytical narratives. These are structured, focused comparisons of strategic choice in counterinsurgency. In Chapter 6, I address the fit between the theory and the historical data presented in the preceding chapters. What does the theory predict? What is the evidence? How well does the evidence fit the theory?

I have separated the presentation and evaluation of the data for two reasons. The first is the issue of reporting bias. As noted above, a case study that reports only the parameters specified in the theory denies the reader the ability to evaluate alternative

explanations. The second and related issue is coherence. A decision to evaluate each and every decision node would interrupt the thread of the argument and make the process of evaluating theoretical validity more difficult.

Chapter 3

The French War in Indochina (1945-1954)

Theory and Prediction

The theory suggests that professional militaries will struggle to develop effective responses to counterinsurgency. The military operational code will distort their initial response, interpretation of performance, and subsequent strategic choices. The military operational code and bureaucratic interests will produce dominant intrawar and interwar patterns of learning dysfunction. Militaries will respond to insurgency with Model 1. Failure to resolve the problem will lead to Model 1 exploitation rather than search. When exploitation options have been exhausted, militaries will adopt Model 2 strategies and shift their focus from attack on the guerillas to population control. The transition to peace will trigger a selective purge of recent experience. Bureaucratic interests and the operational code will lead militaries to retain routines and jettison Model 2 and Model 3 strategies.

Changes in three independent variables – task performance, civilian participation, and resources - will explain deviation from these intrawar and interwar patterns. High civilian participation increases the likelihood that Model 3 strategies will be explored early in the campaign when their efficacy is greatest. Low civilian participation will increase the likelihood of prolonged Model 1 exploitation. High resource levels will reinforce the military's enthusiasm for Model 1. Low resource levels will increase the likelihood that Model 3 strategies will be chosen. Changes in these independent variables will be expressed through specific causal mechanisms. Civilian participation influences strategic choice through three mechanisms: deliberate choice, parallel evaluation, and

norms of political exchange. Resources influence strategic choice through four mechanisms: budget constraints, resource regression, bureaucratic influence, and factor endowment effects.

The French war in Indochina validates many of the theory's predictions. The dominant intrawar pattern is clearly visible. From December 1946 through 1951, the French applied a Model 1 solution under the belief that the problem was essentially military in nature. By 1952, with their exploitation options exhausted, the French began to experiment with Model 2 strategies of population control. In the final year of the war, frustration with Model 2, rising enemy pressure, and the advice of American military advisers led the French back in the direction of Model 1.

The impact of the military operational code on French choice is also clear. The long Model 1 campaign began with a failure to recognize the political nature of the problem. The illusion of familiarity led the French to apply Model 1 small war strategies. Confronted with the paradox of small victories and campaign stalemate, the French chose exploitation over exploration – an example of the Model 1 learning trap at work.

Extreme resource scarcity, high civilian participation, and individual insight explain the only major deviation from the pattern: the French decision to adopt a Model 3 response in the first year of the war. Extensive civilian participation ensured that the response was a deliberate choice rather than the standard patterned response. Resource scarcity influenced choice through two mechanisms: binding budget constraints and bureaucratic influence. The French lacked the manpower to pursue Model 1 and the small military footprint meant that civilian diplomats retained significant influence in the early stages of the campaign. Resources played an equally significant role in the collapse

of this Model 3 strategy. Rising French military manpower lifted the budget constraint and encouraged a return to the more familiar Model 1 formula. This same surge meant that civilian opinion was increasingly eclipsed by the bureaucratic influence of military staffs.

Summary

French strategy in Indochina can be divided into five phases. During the first phase, stretching from the reoccupation of Cochinchina and Annam in the fall of 1945 through the spring of 1946, the French military under General Leclerc pursued a mixed strategy of military action and political negotiation that culminated with the reoccupation of Tonkin and the conclusion of political accords with the Viet Minh. The second phase began with the outbreak of open hostilities between the French and the Viet Minh in November and December of 1946 and stretched through the fall of 1950. During this period, the French pursued a Model 1 strategy focused on the defeat of the Viet Minh military forces. This period saw major advances on the level of military routines; the French introduced innovations in the areas of airborne operations, armored pursuit, amphibious and riverine operations, and fortification. The third phase stretched from the French defeat at Cao Bang in October 1950 through the launch of the French offensive at Hoa Binh in late 1951. General de Lattre's strategy in this period was overwhelmingly conventional in nature, focusing on efforts to expand the size and capacity of French forces in theater. De Lattre's victories over the Viet Minh regular army in 1951 reinforced the French commitment to Model 1 strategy.

The fourth phase, from December 1951 through March 1953, covered the tenure of General Salan. Under Salan, the French military mounted parallel responses to the rising power of the Viet Minh. At Na San, Salan introduced the concept of the fortified camp as a means of introducing and sustaining French heavy forces into the remote regions of Tonkin. On the unconventional front, Salan sponsored a number of experiments in political war (Model 2). While the majority of the energies of the military remained focused on the conventional war with the Viet Minh, the French began to make investments in psychological operations, population resettlement, and the sponsorship of guerilla movements among ethnic minorities. The final phase, from March 1953 through the defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, corresponded with the command of General Navarre. The relief of Salan and the appointment of Navarre marked a return to the search for decisive battle. Though Navarre did nothing to suppress the unconventional initiatives developed under Salan, the weight of French strategy shifted once more to Model 1.

French Indochina (1945-1954)	Phase 1: Reconquest (10/45-3/46)	Phase 2: From Politics to Conventional Response (4/46-10/50)	Phase 3: Conventional Defeat and Conventional Resurrection (11/50-12/51)	Phase 4: Conventional Defense and Experimentation (1/52-5/53)	Phase 5: Return to Decisive Battle (5/53-5/54)
Military Commander	Leclerc	Valluy ¹⁶²	de Lattre	Salan	Navarre
COIN Strategy	Model 3	Model 1	Model 1	Model 1.5	Model 1
Operational Innovations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partisans Riverine (Dinassaut) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amphibious Groups Dinassaut Expansion Outposts System Airborne 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobile Groups De Lattre Line (Tonkin fortifications) Vietnamese Army 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Pacification Groups (GAMOs) Resettlement GCMA/GMI (maquis) Psychological Operations Air-Ground Bases (Na San) 	
Success/Failure	Success (Reconquest)	Stalemate Episodic Failure (Cao Bang)	Episodic Success (Vinh Yen, Mao Khe, Day River)	Trend Failure Episodic Failure (Highland Offensives, Na San, Delta pacification)	Episodic Failure (Street without Joy, Dien Bien Phu)
Resources (Manpower)	Very Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Resources (Equipment)	Very Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High
Civilian Participation	High	Low	Low ¹⁶³	Low	Low

Indochina before 1945

On the eve of the Second World War, the French had occupied Indochina for almost a hundred years.¹⁶⁴ During that time, the French developed a detailed understanding of the culture and politics of Indochina, and built an administrative and

¹⁶² General Valluy was the military commander from October 1946 through January 1948.

¹⁶³ De Lattre's simultaneous assumption of the senior military and civilian posts of G n super and High Commissioner gave him unified control over civil and military administration in Indochina. This unification did not lead to expanded civilian influence over strategy. Instead, it led to the redefinition of civilian policy as an extension of the effort to boost military resources, manpower and materiel.

¹⁶⁴ The formal conquest of Indochina began in 1858 in Annam. By 1878 the French had formalized control over all of Indochina under the Union of Indochina (Source: Jacques Dalloz, *The War in Indochina, 1945-1954* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 1).

police structure to keep resistance groups in check. While they were forced to mount periodic campaigns against bandit groups in the north,¹⁶⁵ the maintenance of colonial control was relatively inexpensive. Gallieni and Lyautey, the intellectual fathers of the French colonial tradition of counterinsurgency and colonial administration, both served long tours in Tonkin and their experiences exerted a powerful and lasting influence on the colonial army. For a significant portion of the colonial officer corps, and for many of the senior leaders who would set French strategy from 1945 on, the Indochina war was to be fought on familiar ground.

While the French possessions in Indochina included what we now know as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the Indochina war was largely confined to the three parts of present day Vietnam. Under French rule, Vietnam was divided into three separate administrative regions: Tonkin in the north, Annam in the center, and Cochinchina in the far south. The terrain of each region dictated the patterns of settlement and economic activity. Tonkin, home to 8.5 million people, or roughly 40-45% of the population of the three provinces,¹⁶⁶ could be further divided into the Red River delta and the hinterlands of northern and western Tonkin. The Red River delta was the center of intensive agriculture in northern Vietnam and the Indochina war would revolve around French attempts to pacify this region and Viet Minh attempts to seize it by force or subversion. Far fewer people lived outside the Red River delta, and most that did belonged to the non-Vietnamese minorities or hill tribes. Lacking the arable land to grow rice in large quantities, these tribes relied on a mix of subsistence agriculture and poppy cultivation.

¹⁶⁵ Raoul Salan, *Mémoires: Fin d'un Empire, Le sens d'un engagement, juin 1899-septembre 1946* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1970), pp. 32.

¹⁶⁶ These population statistics are based on the 1936 census and inflated based on estimated growth rates (Source: Judith Banister, *The Population of Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commerce Department, October 1985), *International Population Reports*, Series P-95, No. 77).

Tonkin and northern Annam were also home to a large portion of the Catholic population of Vietnam.¹⁶⁷

Annam, which stretched from the narrow northern neck of the country at Ninh Binh to the base of the central highlands at Phan Thiet, was home to 7 million people or roughly 30% of the overall population of Vietnam. The topography of Annam, dominated by the rugged and less arable central highlands, meant that the majority of the population was concentrated along a narrow coastal strip.

Cochinchina, though much smaller than Annam or Tonkin, was situated in the fertile Mekong delta. Like the Red River delta in the north, the Mekong delta was a center of rice cultivation and settlement. While the 6 million inhabitants of Cochinchina (~25% of the total population of the three provinces) were relatively homogenous in ethnic terms, the Hoa Hao¹⁶⁸ and Cao Dai¹⁶⁹ religious sects were socially distinct from the Buddhist majority.

The Collapse of French Order (1940-1945)

The Viet Minh rise to power in 1945 was the direct result of the collapse of French colonial control during the Second World War. France's defeat in 1940 left a weakened Vichy colonial regime to face encroachment by Japanese forces. The slow

¹⁶⁷ The Catholic population of Vietnam in the immediate postwar period was around 1.7 million or 6-7% of the total population. The Catholics represented 15-20% of the population of Tonkin during the same period. (Source: Paul et Marie-Catherine Villatoux, *La République et son armée face au "péril subversif": Guerre et action psychologiques (1945-1960)* (Paris: Les Indes savants, 2005), pp. 277.)

¹⁶⁸ The best estimates of the size of the Hoa Hao sect in 1950 fall between 600,000 and 700,000 (Source: Pascal Bourdeaux, "Approches statistiques de la communauté du bouddhisme Hoà Hao" in Christopher E. Goscha, Benoît De Tréglodé (eds.), *Naissance d'un État-Parti: Le Viêt Nam depuis 1945* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2004), pp. 299).

¹⁶⁹ The Cao Dai population of postcolonial Vietnam numbered somewhere between 1 and 2 million (Source: A. Terry Rambo, *Searching for Vietnam: Selected writings on Vietnamese Culture and Society* (Kyoto University Press, 2005), pp. 85).

erosion of French colonial authority from 1940 through 1944 was followed by three sharp shocks that put paid to French control in the region. A severe famine in Tonkin, the Japanese takeover in March 1945, and the vacuum that followed the Japanese surrender five months later, stripped the French of any remaining power in Indochina. When French troops returned in the fall of 1945, they faced not simply a restoration of order but a reconquest of three lost colonies.

Though the French managed to retain the vestiges of colonial control in Indochina from the fall of France in 1940 through March 1945, real authority had shifted increasingly into the hands of the Japanese forces that had been stationed in the country from the fall of 1940 on. While the French authorities maintained military forces, police and security services in the colonies, their freedom of action and their ability to control native resistance steadily declined over the course of the occupation.¹⁷⁰

The first sharp blow to the weakened French regime came in the winter of 1944-1945 in the form of widespread famine in Tonkin. Over the preceding two decades, increasing population and decreasing acreage devoted to rice cultivation had reduced the margin of survival in Tonkin to a bare minimum. Tonkinese farmers struggled to meet their own needs and the heavy burden of colonial taxation, and by late 1944 these efforts were not enough to overcome the added pressures imposed by the war and natural disaster. Drought, waves of insects, and a series of typhoons severely damaged the rice crops in the spring and autumn of 1944. The French authorities did little to lighten the burden of taxation and focused instead on maintaining adequate stockpiles for military garrisons. Even as the enormity of the problem became clear in the spring of 1945, the

¹⁷⁰ David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 37, 48, 67.

French authorities were slow to respond to the plight of the Tonkinese population. The delay was in part logistical; the deterioration of French transportation systems, in part the result of Allied bombing of rail systems and coastal shipping, made a transfer of excess rice supplies north from Cochinchina very difficult.¹⁷¹ Even so, the French did little to reallocate existing capacity from military or colonial purposes to relief shipments. On the eve of the Japanese coup in March 1945, Tonkinese peasants were beginning to perish in large numbers. While flawed French policy was only one of many causes of the disaster, the death of nearly 1 million peasants or 10% of the population of Tonkin in six months, contributed to the perception of the French authorities as impotent and indifferent.

The second blow to French authority was more direct. The fall of the Vichy regime in late 1944 and Free French moves to reoccupy Indochina¹⁷² prompted the Japanese authorities to seize direct control of Indochina on March 9, 1945. While French forces in Indochina put up serious but scattered resistance to the Japanese coup, they were unequal to the task and most were either killed or captured.¹⁷³

The Japanese seizure of power had important and lasting political effects. In Indochina, as elsewhere in colonial Asia, Japanese conquest removed the aura of European invincibility and with it their natural claim to governmental authority. The Japanese proceeded to install a Vietnamese puppet government in Tonkin and Annam

¹⁷¹ Ibid., Marr, pp. 99.

¹⁷² In 1944, the leaders of the Free French movement began to plan their return to Indochina. French and American preparations for action in Southeast Asia played a role in the Japanese decision to launch their coup against the Vichy authorities in March 1945 (Sources: Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the U.S. Army in Vietnam 1941-1960* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), pp. 29; Dixee R. Bartholomew-Feis, *The OSS and Ho Chi Minh: Unexpected Allies in the War against Japan* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), pp. 119-121).

¹⁷³ Several large contingents managed to escape north to KMT controlled China (Source: Jacques Dalloz, *The War in Indochina, 1945-1954* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 43-44).

with the Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai as its nominal sovereign.¹⁷⁴ Anti-colonial resistance groups, including the Viet Minh, were the primary, local beneficiaries of regime change. The disappearance of the French security services removed an important check on their ability to organize resistance and assert power in the remoter regions. In some cases, Japanese authorities eager to expunge any remaining French influence offered open or clandestine support to such groups.

The Japanese surrender five months later opened the way for the Viet Minh seizure of power. In the vacuum that followed the surrender, the Viet Minh took control of Hanoi and Saigon and declared itself the government of a sovereign and independent Vietnam. Weeks before the first Allied occupation forces arrived in Indochina, the stage had been set for the clash between the former colonial authorities and the newly installed Viet Minh government under Ho Chi Minh.

Phase 1: Leclerc and the Reconquest of Indochina (October 1945-March 1946)

In the first phase of the Indochina war, the French applied a Model 3 solution to the emerging counterinsurgency problem. This response was the product of at least three influences: the imprint of an unusual military commander, extreme resource scarcity and high civilian participation in policymaking. Though General Leclerc managed to pursue an integrated political military strategy from the fall of 1945 through the signature of the interim accords in March 1946, the equilibrium he established was unstable. Deep military skepticism, increasing French military forces in the region, and the very success of the reconquest encouraged senior French leaders to invite a direct military confrontation with the Viet Minh. Integrated political-military strategy would not survive

¹⁷⁴ In Cochinchina the Japanese maintained direct military rule.

the weight of French military opinion, increased military resources and the departure of General Leclerc.

The French responded to the Japanese surrender and the Viet Minh seizure of power by pushing for the rapid introduction of French forces into all three provinces. General de Gaulle, as leader of the French provisional government, directed the newly appointed High Commissioner for Indochina, Admiral d'Argenlieu, and his military commander, General Leclerc, to re-establish French sovereignty in Indochina as swiftly as possible.¹⁷⁵ Severe limits on the forces available, and complete dependence on Allied shipping for the transit, combined to delay the introduction of those forces until October 15, 1945.

In accordance with Allied occupation plans agreed upon at Potsdam in July 1945,¹⁷⁶ it was the Chinese Nationalists and the British who were to assume responsibility for the initial postwar occupation of the country and the disarmament of the Japanese. The Nationalists were to occupy all of Indochina north of the 16th parallel, effectively taking control of Tonkin; the British were to assume responsibility south of the 16th parallel. Twelve days after the Japanese surrender Chinese Nationalists moved into Tonkin, reaching Hanoi on September 9, 1945; on September 12, the first sizable British troop contingents arrived in Saigon.

The Chinese and British took radically different approaches to Viet Minh claims of sovereignty in Vietnam. The Chinese commander Lu Han extended de facto recognition to the Viet Minh government in Hanoi in return for supplies and the freedom

¹⁷⁵ Frederic Turpin, "1945, l'amiral d'Argenlieu et le general Leclerc, en Indochine, aux sources d'une rivalité célèbre," *Revue historique des armées (RHA)*, No. 213 (December 1998), pp. 89; *ibid.*, Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 148.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Spector, pp. 51.

to manipulate the local currency for his personal benefit. The Chinese occupation of the north was to be dominated by the extraction of wealth for personal gain, and the maintenance of political order was subordinated to this project.¹⁷⁷ The British, in contrast, sought to unseat the Viet Minh government in the south and restore some measure of French colonial control. The British commander, General Gracey, declared martial law in Saigon on September 21, 1945 and committed British, rearmed French POWs and Japanese troops to the suppression of the revolution in the south.¹⁷⁸

Well before setting foot in Indochina, Leclerc proposed a mixed strategy of military reconquest and political concession. Leclerc insisted that the most important first step was to reintroduce sizable French military forces.¹⁷⁹ Without such forces, the French could not hope to eject either the Viet Minh or the Chinese Nationalist forces intent on looting the Northern provinces. Once French military control had been demonstrated, negotiations with the other political parties would cement French authority.

While Leclerc was eager to achieve the stated aim of re-establishing French sovereignty, he was keenly aware of the role of local nationalist fervor and the profound limits of French power in 1945. Jean Saintenay, the senior French representative in Hanoi, had made Leclerc aware of the widespread popular support for the Viet Minh. In a meeting at Kandy in September 1945, Lord Mountbatten stressed to Leclerc that there

¹⁷⁷ David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 543-544; *ibid.*, Spector, pp. 53-54.

¹⁷⁸ John Springhall, "'Kicking out the Vietminh': How Britain Allowed France to Reoccupy South Indochina, 1945-1946," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2005, pp. 115-130; Geraint Hughes, "A 'Post-war' War: The British Occupation of French-Indochina, September 1945-March 1946," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 263-286.

¹⁷⁹ Commandant Gilbert Bodinier, *La guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954, Textes et Documents, Vol. 1, Le Retour de la France en Indochine 1945-1946*, pp. 150-151; Lieutenant-colonel (er) Gilbert Bodinier, "Le général Leclerc et la négociation vietnamienne," *Revue historique des armées (RHA)*, No. 227 (June 2002), pp. 62, 64.

could be no return to the colonial status quo of the prewar period. The Western powers would be compelled to offer major concessions in order to retain and protect their essential interests in the colonies.¹⁸⁰ Leclerc appears to have accepted this argument, writing soon afterward that the achievable goal would be a flexible defense of French interests but not necessarily a return to the prewar sovereign relationship.¹⁸¹ Leclerc appeared to accept the need to grant some real measure of autonomy in Indochina in order to preserve a meaningful French role in the area.¹⁸²

Leclerc's plan to accomplish this was simple and remarkably bold.¹⁸³ In light of the weakness of his military forces and the enormity of the task, Leclerc set out to reconquer Indochina in two phases. The first would involve an invasion of Cochinchina, with French forces first securing Saigon with the help of the British and then rapidly driving north into Annam. The second step would be to reoccupy the north and eject the Chinese nationalists. Once those two goals were accomplished, the French could set about reshaping the internal politics of the provinces. Leclerc left open the possibility that this might involve contact with the Viet Minh, but he insisted that these matters could only be resolved after the French seizure of control.

Leclerc opened the campaign with a demonstration of pure audacity. On October 15, 1945, the same day that the first French expeditionary troops landed in Saigon, Leclerc flew into Phnom Penh and called for a meeting with the self-appointed

¹⁸⁰ Andre Martel, *Leclerc: Le soldat et le politique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), pp. 362-363.

¹⁸¹ Lieutenant-colonel (er) Gilbert Bodinier, "Le général Leclerc et la négociation vietnamienne," *Revue historique des armées (RHA)*, No. 227 (June 2002), pp. 65; General Leclerc, "Rapport du Général Leclerc sur l'évolution de la situation en Indochine depuis la fin du mois d'aout, Kandy, le 25 Septembre 1945," Gilbert Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine 1945-1946* (Vincennes: Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, 1987), pp. 187.

¹⁸² General Leclerc, "Télégramme du Général Leclerc, Saigon, le 14 février 1946," in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 208-209.

¹⁸³ General Leclerc, "Memorandum du Général Leclerc pour le Colonel de Guillebon, Kandy, le 7 Septembre 1945," in Gilbert Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine 1945-1946*, pp. 164-171.

Cambodian Prime Minister who had overthrown the King in a nationalist coup some two months earlier. When Prime Minister Son Ngoc Thanh arrived for the meeting at the British embassy, Leclerc invited him to join him in his car, then promptly arrested him and flew him to Saigon. With Thanh out of power, Leclerc installed the uncle of the Cambodian king as the new Prime Minister and monarch and proceeded on to Saigon.¹⁸⁴

Leclerc then set in motion the reconquest of Cochinchina and Annam. With a mere 4,500 troops at his disposal, Leclerc had to rely as much on stagecraft as on brute force. Leaving a mix of British, liberated French POWs, and semi-willing Japanese troops to clear Saigon, Leclerc ordered the French expeditionary forces under Colonel Massu to stage a series of armored and amphibious raids in the areas south and north of Saigon.¹⁸⁵ Leclerc hoped that rapid and visible displays of French military force would keep the Viet Minh off balance and impress the local populace and restore French prestige.¹⁸⁶

The results of Leclerc's strategy in the south were mixed. On one level, the campaign was a remarkable coup de main. In roughly two months, Leclerc's forces managed to recapture control of the major arteries and towns of Cochinchina at the cost of 477 dead.¹⁸⁷ Starting in January 1946, Leclerc used his expanded force of some with 30,000 troops to repeat the same feat in Annam.¹⁸⁸ While these raids established nominal French control over Vietnamese territory south of the 16th parallel, there were early indications of the limits of real control. French units generally found that the population

¹⁸⁴ Général Yves Gras, *Histoire de la Guerre d'Indochine* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1979), pp. 54-55.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., Gras, pp. 57-58, 63.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., Gras, pp. 58.

¹⁸⁷ This figure is based on French records of the total French losses (killed in action, died, and missing) between October 1945 and the end of January 1946 (Source: Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 82.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., Gras, pp. 62.

fled in advance of the armored columns and subsequently refused to cooperate with the French or volunteer information on the insurgents.¹⁸⁹ The Viet Minh pursued a deliberate scorched earth policy, often destroying major towns and cities and executing local notables and Europeans.¹⁹⁰ Though Viet Minh units rarely opposed the arrival of French troops, they began a campaign of harassment that progressively sapped the strength of the Expeditionary Corps. Even in the absence of major combat engagements, the 9th Colonial Infantry Division had lost fully a third of its effectives to combat or disease in the first two months of the reconquest.¹⁹¹ Though Leclerc could claim as of February 6, 1945 to have conquered Cochinchina and southern Annam, the level of permanent control in the countryside was quite limited. With 2.5 French soldiers for every 1,000 inhabitants at the peak of the reconquest, a tenth of the Quinlivan threshold, and far fewer after the withdrawal of British and Japanese forces in January 1946, real consolidation and pacification of the south remained largely undone.¹⁹² As General Valluy would put in September 1946, “We have laid our hands on the entire country. We hold it only by our fingertips.”¹⁹³

As his campaigns in Cochinchina and Annam drew to a close, Leclerc was eager to parley these military successes into a rapid occupation of the north. In his communications with de Gaulle, Leclerc made it clear that the 150,000 Chinese Nationalist troops,¹⁹⁴ rather than the self-appointed government of the Viet Minh, were

¹⁸⁹ Cite Gras, pp. 63.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., Dalloz, pp. 60.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, Gras, pp. 63-64.

¹⁹² Ibid., Gras, pp. 65.

¹⁹³ General Valluy, “Extraits d’un rapport mensuel paru sous le timbre du conseiller militaire du haut commissaire et signé Général Valluy, Saigon, le 10 septembre 1946,” in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 286.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., Spector, pp. 52.

the principal obstacle to the reassertion of French sovereignty in Tonkin.¹⁹⁵ In order to unseat them and avoid an expansion of hostilities Leclerc sought negotiated agreements with the Chinese and the Viet Minh government in Hanoi. Leclerc encouraged his principal negotiators to flatter their counterparts and concede non-essential points in order to facilitate a swift and unopposed entry into Tonkin.¹⁹⁶ These efforts culminated in separate agreements with the Chinese and the Viet Minh.

The latter agreement, the March 6 interim agreements, established a *modus vivendi* governing relations between the French and Viet Minh authorities. In return for an agreement to suspend hostilities and welcome French troops in Tonkin, the French recognized the Republic of Vietnam as a “free state with its own government, parliament, army and finances, forming a part of the Indo-China Federation and the French Union.”¹⁹⁷ In addition, the French offered to hold a popular referendum on the question of the unification of the three provinces of Vietnam.¹⁹⁸ In the military annex to the agreement, the French agreed to limit the number of French forces in Tonkin to 25,000¹⁹⁹ and set a timetable for their phased withdrawal within five years.²⁰⁰

While not all French parties were comfortable with the concessions made in the March 6, 1946 agreements,²⁰¹ they paved the way for a largely unopposed French return

¹⁹⁵ Général Leclerc, “Lettre de Général Leclerc au Général de Gaulle, Saigon le 14 janvier 1946,” in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 200.

¹⁹⁶ Général Leclerc, “Note pour le Général Salan rédigée par l’état-major du Général Leclerc, Saigon, le 27 février 1946,” in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 213-216.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., Dalloz, pp. 69.

¹⁹⁸ “Texte de l’accord conclu a Hanoi” in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 221-222.

¹⁹⁹ The agreement allowed 15,000 European troops and an additional 10,000 Indochinese troops under French command.

²⁰⁰ “Accord complémentaire de Hanoi, 7 mars 1946” in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 223-224.

²⁰¹ Amiral d’Argenlieu, “Lettre de l’amiral d’Argenlieu au General Leclerc, Saigon, le 10 mars 1946” in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*; ibid., Bodinier, “Le général Leclerc et la négociation vietnamienne,” pp. 72.

to Haiphong and Hanoi.²⁰² It appears clear that neither side considered the concessions to be final. For Leclerc the concessions were a means to introduce forces into Tonkin and set the stage for more contentious discussions later.²⁰³ If, as Leclerc argued at the start of the negotiations in January 1946, the agreement was simply a means to prevent the outbreak of a “holy war”²⁰⁴ against the French in spring 1946, it was a masterful achievement. With a force of fewer than 55,000 men, Leclerc had managed in the space of five months to reoccupy all of Indochina, pressure the Chinese Nationalists to leave and avoid the outbreak of open hostilities with the Viet Minh in Tonkin. As he noted to General Salan on March 10, French military action and the conclusion of the March 6 accords were but the opening phase of a broader negotiation that must be carried on in Paris.

Origins of Early French Strategy in Indochina

The French embrace of a hybrid political-military strategy in the opening phase of the Indochina conflict was a product of judgment and circumstance. Leclerc’s flexibility and political acumen were the result of a career devoted in large measure to irregular warfare and political-military intrigue. As one who had unseated several Vichy governments in central Africa between 1940 and 1942, Leclerc was fully at ease in the grey area between conspiratorial politics and war. Equally important, Leclerc clearly recognized that he lacked the military resources to reconquer and pacify all of Indochina

²⁰² When the French landed at Haiphong on March 6, 1946, Chinese troops opened fire on the French vessels inflicting a number of casualties. The signature of the March 6 accords with the Viet Minh effectively forced the Chinese to relent and drop their opposition to French reentry (Source: Gras, pp. 95-98).

²⁰³ Ibid., Bodinier, “Le général Leclerc et la négociation vietnamienne,” pp. 70.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., Bodinier, “Le général Leclerc et la négociation vietnamienne,” pp. 66.

directly in 1945 and 1946. It is far from accidental that the period of maximum French political flexibility coincided with the nadir of French military strength in the region.

General Leclerc was far from a typical product of the prewar French army. First, he was uncommonly young, by far the youngest of the three French marshals to emerge from the Second World War. A 38 year old captain on the eve of the German invasion of France, Leclerc's active service record included six years of pacification duty and combat in French Morocco.²⁰⁵ After joining the Free French cause in 1940, Leclerc was sent on an explicitly political mission to Africa to rally the Vichy colony of Cameroun. In spite of the untimely desertion of the only battalion of troops assigned to the mission, Leclerc led a handful of officer and NCOs to the capital of Douala, seized the city and declared himself the military governor of Cameroun.²⁰⁶ Leclerc's subsequent success in the administration of Cameroun and the invasion of neighboring Gabon explain his unique appreciation of the dynamics of coups.²⁰⁷ Though his subsequent conventional service in Chad and the liberation of France were later to overshadow these early experiences in irregular war and insurgent activity, the latter would prove far more relevant to the problems he faced in the opening months of the Indochina conflict.

Leclerc's reconquest of Indochina in 1945-1946 was the high water mark of direct civilian participation in French counterinsurgency strategy. Leclerc afforded Jean Saintenay, the lead French negotiator in Hanoi and the primary architect of the March 6 accords, substantial latitude to craft a settlement that enabled the French to reoccupy the

²⁰⁵ André Martel, "Philippe Leclerc de Hauteclocque 1902-1947," *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 227 (June 2002), pp. 48; Anthony Clayton, *Three Marshals of France: Leadership after Trauma* (London: Brassey's UK, 1992), pp. 36-37.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., Clayton, pp. 43-44.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., Clayton, pp. 45-46.

north and set the stage for further consolidation. No civilian leader in Indochina would wield similar influence for the remainder of the Indochina struggle.

Circumstance played a major role in early French war strategy as well. The absence of manpower, materiel, and transport precluded a straightforward conventional military campaign in Indochina in 1945 and 1946. Leclerc's reports and commentary at the time make it clear that resource constraints drove strategy in the reconquest of the south and the need to pursue a negotiated outcome in Tonkin.²⁰⁸ Where Leclerc stood out from his colleagues was in his relatively keen perception of the future burdens of major war in Indochina.²⁰⁹ While many of his colleagues appear to have interpreted early military successes in 1945 and 1946 as proof of the weakness of the opposition and the superiority of French forces, Leclerc highlighted the risks of an open ended guerilla conflict.

Circumstance also played a substantial role in Leclerc's dominant role in shaping the strategy of this period. De Gaulle's appointee for the post of High Commissioner in Indochina, Admiral d'Argenlieu, was far less enthusiastic about Leclerc's flexible approach to the problem of restoring French authority. A loyal Gaullist but a more traditional military leader, d'Argenlieu feared that Leclerc's concessions might jeopardize French claims to full sovereignty in Indochina. Only Leclerc's early arrival in theater and the press of events in the ground campaign enabled him to dominate French strategy in spite of the growing skepticism of his superior d'Argenlieu.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., Bodinier, "Le général Leclerc et la négociation vietnamienne," pp. 65-66.

²⁰⁹ Raoul Salan, *Le Viêt-Minh Mon Adversaire* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1971), pp. 34-35.

Phase 2: From Politics to Conventional Military Response (1946-1950)

The Model 3 strategy set by Leclerc and embodied in the March 6 accords never sat well with the High Commissioner or several of the other senior military commanders. Power sharing, even of a temporary nature, appeared inappropriate in an environment of rising French power and resources. Almost as soon as the March accords had been signed, d'Argenlieu and many of Leclerc's subordinates began to advocate a rapid move to assert full French authority.²¹⁰ The outbreak of fighting in Haiphong and Hanoi gave the French the opportunity to move from the uncomfortable *modus vivendi* (Model 3) to more familiar realm of small war (Model 1). From the suppression of the Viet Minh uprisings in Tonkin to General Valluy's major offensives in 1947, early French victories reinforced the military's attachment to Model 1. From the winter of 1947 on, French command sought to crush the rebellion by defeating the Viet Minh armies in the field and by flushing the guerilla forces out of the populated areas of Tonkin and Cochinchina.

Even before the signature of the March 6 accords, Admiral d'Argenlieu had begun to express grave reservations about Leclerc's policy of negotiation in Tonkin. Though it appears clear that Leclerc harbored few illusions as to the permanence of such accords or the good faith of the Viet Minh delegation,²¹¹ d'Argenlieu feared that Leclerc's conciliatory approach had seriously undermined the French position in Indochina. Where Leclerc acknowledged the new power of local elites and Vietnamese

²¹⁰ The French military's preference for a Model 1 solution to the reconquest can be seen as early as 1944 in the comments of General Sabattier (Source: Général Sabattier, "Note pour le gouvernement du général Sabattier, commandant les troupes françaises en Chine, Chungking, le 28 mai 1945," in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 143). Général Valluy made similar views known in the aftermath of the signing of the March accords (Source: Général Valluy, "Expose du Général Valluy sur les raisons d'ordre militaire qui s'opposent à l'exécution d'un 'coup de force'" in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 233).

²¹¹ André Martel, "Leclerc au tournant de l'Indochine (janvier-février 1947)," *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 204 (septembre 1996), pp. 65.

nationalism, d'Argenlieu sought a stricter and carefully managed transition to limited, local autonomy.²¹² If d'Argenlieu acknowledged that the prewar could not be restored in its entirety, and insisted that the new order would be more liberal, he nonetheless resisted Leclerc's calls for concessions on granting "independence" to local parties.²¹³ D'Argenlieu's subsequent actions in Indochina reinforced the impression that local aspirations would play a very minor role compared with the imperative of French power. Instead of granting the Vietnamese independence and a union of the three provinces, d'Argenlieu offered limited autonomy and federal status within a French administered union.²¹⁴ De Gaulle's late war proclamations of a new order in Indochina notwithstanding, d'Argenlieu's new government installed in October 1945 did not include a single native member.²¹⁵

The split between liberal pragmatists under Leclerc and more conservative restorationists under d'Argenlieu widened as the negotiations in Tonkin approached the March 6 climax.²¹⁶ While Leclerc argued that local nationalist sentiment demanded some level of conciliation and negotiation, d'Argenlieu grew increasingly wary of concessions he felt might amount to a "new Munich" in Indochina.²¹⁷ D'Argenlieu and other longtime observers of the region began to suspect that Leclerc had conceded far too much to an enemy whose military strength was trifling. They believed that the return of good governance and clear French control would be accepted by a populace.²¹⁸

²¹² Ibid., Gras, pp. 102.

²¹³ Amiral Thierry d'Argenlieu, "Instructions politiques de l'Amiral d'Argenlieu" in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 173; Francis Foronda, "Le dernier moine-soldat: l'amiral Thierry d'Argenlieu," *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 204 (September 1996), pp. 82.

²¹⁴ Ibid., Dalloz, pp. 63.

²¹⁵ Ibid., Dalloz, pp. 63.

²¹⁶ Ibid., Gras, pp. 100.

²¹⁷ Ibid., Dalloz, pp. 71; Gras, pp. 103.

²¹⁸ Ibid., Gras, pp. 101.

Almost as soon as the accords were in place, d'Argenlieu began to draw back from the rapprochement. His sponsorship of a declaration of independence by the state of Cochinchina was clearly an attempt to block Viet Minh moves for a referendum on national unification. Similarly, d'Argenlieu's decision to overrule Leclerc and hold follow on negotiations with the Viet Minh in Dalat rather than in Paris was a calculated snub to the Viet Minh government in Hanoi.²¹⁹ In private conversations, d'Argenlieu made clear that growing military strength made negotiation unnecessary and humiliating:

I am amazed, yes, that is the word, amazed that France has such a fine Expeditionary Corps and yet its leaders would rather negotiate than fight.²²⁰

The growing rift between Leclerc and d'Argenlieu over the implementation of the March 6 accords led Leclerc to request reassignment in April 1946.

The dispute between Leclerc and d'Argenlieu took place in the context of military success and the rapid expansion of available military resources. While Leclerc had had to make due with a shoe string force of less than 5,000 in the opening months of the reconquest of Cochinchina, d'Argenlieu could call on a force of nearly 90,000 troops by the time of Leclerc's eventual departure in July 1946.²²¹ With Chinese forces withdrawing and French troops flowing into Tonkin, the balance of forces appeared to be shifting in favor of the colonial authorities. Faced with what they considered an upstart and illegitimate government in Hanoi, d'Argenlieu and his senior military commanders began to believe that renewed confrontation might lead to a favorable change in local

²¹⁹ Ibid., Dalloz, pp. 71-73.

²²⁰ Amiral d'Argenlieu as cited in Ronald Spector, *In the Ruins of Empire*, pp. 234; ibid., Bodinier, "Le général Leclerc et la négociation vietnamienne," pp. 68.

²²¹ Total French military forces in Indochina equaled 90,152 as of July 31, 1946 (Source: Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 85). The Viet Minh appear to have had some 80-100,000 troops in 1946, of whom roughly 35,000 were in Tonkin (Source: Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 96-97).

government.²²² As Bernard Fall pointed out, rising French power made some bid for full control almost irresistible:

“The French forces sent to Indochina were too strong for France to resist the temptation of using them; yet not strong enough to keep the Viet-Minh from trying to solve the whole political problem by throwing the French into the sea.”²²³

The uneasy cohabitation of French force and the Viet Minh in Tonkin did not last long.

Viet Minh leaders frustrated by the breakdown of negotiations with the French at Dalat and later Fontainebleau, believed that war might lead to a precipitous French withdrawal.

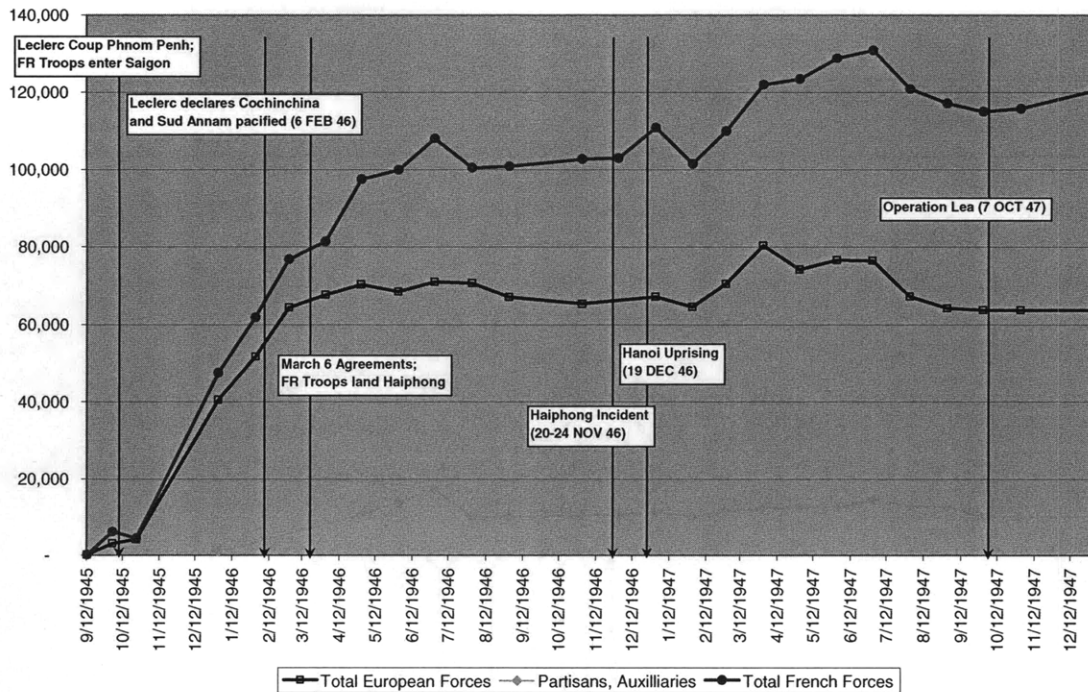
The French or their part suspected that confrontation might provide an opportunity to break the Viet Minh and restore full French sovereignty in Tonkin.²²⁴

²²² Ibid., Gras, pp. 141. In anticipation of a breakdown in negotiations, d’Argenlieu informed Valluy that French forces must be prepared to deliver a decisive blow (Source: Amiral d’Argenlieu, “Lettre de l’amiral d’Argenlieu au general Valluy, Saigon, le 12 novembre 1946,” in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 315).

²²³ Bernard Fall, *Street without Joy* (Harrisburg, PA: The Telegraph Press, 1964), pp. 27.

²²⁴ Ibid., Gras, 142.

French Force Levels in Indochina (1945-47)



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An armed clash in Haiphong on November 20, 1946 provided the pretext for this test of strength.²²⁶ What started as an exchange of gunfire between French and Viet Minh forces over a customs dispute soon widened into a full scale, urban battle. In spite of some local efforts to re-establish a cease fire, the senior French commander and acting High Commissioner General Valluy ordered his subordinates Dèbes and Morliere to break Viet Minh resistance in Haiphong:

The time has come for us to give a hard lesson to those who have treacherously attacked us. You must make yourselves absolute masters of Haiphong by all means at your disposal and force the command of the Vietnamese army to repent.²²⁷

Within six days, the French had managed to defeat the Viet Minh forces in Haiphong at the cost of 100 French casualties and some 300-6,000 civilian casualties.²²⁸

²²⁵ The data for this graph is drawn from Bodinier's two volumes of primary documents: *Le Retour de la France en Indochine* and *Indochine 1947: Règlement politique ou solution militaire?*

²²⁶ See Gras, pp. 136-138 for information on the ongoing, undeclared war in the south.

²²⁷ General Valluy in Dalloz, pp. 80.

The sharp military defeat inflicted on the Viet Minh did not have the intended political effect. Instead, the Viet Minh began to prepare for a wider struggle in Tonkin. On the night of December 19, 1946, the Viet Minh launched a series of sharp attacks on French garrisons in Hanoi and across Tonkin. While French troops managed to stave off a Viet Minh takeover of Hanoi, the fight to retake first the French quarter and then the Vietnamese sections of the city dragged on through January. Once again, Valluy encouraged his commanders to use maximum force to compel submission: “strike hard with the cannon and the bomb...to finish it quickly and prove to our adversary the crushing superiority of our means.”²²⁹ The French military managed to parry these initial blows and regain control over the major urban areas and roads of Vietnam. The Viet Minh retreated into the countryside and began a low level guerilla struggle against French outposts and convoys.

Leclerc’s final contribution to Indochina strategy came not as a commander but as an inspector. The new French government under Leon Blum, eager to appoint Leclerc High Commissioner, sent him on a formal inspection tour in January 1947. Though Leclerc would later decline the post of High Commissioner, the inspection report he delivered to the French government reveals a clear alternative policy and strategy for the war. Leclerc’s policy had three pillars. First, he favored concessions to Indochinese independence and nationalism within the framework of the French Union. Though Leclerc had privately labeled Ho Chi Minh “a great enemy of France”²³⁰ well before the fighting in Haiphong and Hanoi, he insisted that some form of independence in Indochina

²²⁸ Ibid., Gras, pp. 148

²²⁹ General Valluy as cited in Gras, pp. 163.

²³⁰ General (CR) Jean Compagnon, “Janvier 1947, la décision du Général Leclerc,” *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 208 (September 1997), pp. 128.

was unavoidable. Second, the new order had to protect French interests in Indochina. Third, the French must maintain substantial military forces in coastal enclaves.²³¹ On the level of military strategy, Leclerc argued there were two choices. First, the French could reconquer the country by force, a task that would demand a minimum of 350,000 troops. Second, the French could pursue a negotiated outcome provided that they established a position of military strength. The second option would require a minimum of 115,000 troops (including 100,000 Europeans) for two years.²³²

Leclerc's recommendations demonstrate a conception of counterinsurgency fundamentally at odds with the military operational code and the opinion of most the senior French military commanders in Indochina in 1946. Where most commanders considered the Viet Minh military and government the primary problem, and the Vietnamese population a secondary consideration, Leclerc consistently highlighted the active role of popular opinion and considered the battlefield test secondary and potentially distracting. Where d'Argenlieu and Valluy saw military domination as a precondition for a stable political outcome, Leclerc saw the resort to force and the urge to dictate terms as highly problematic. A political settlement acceptable to the Vietnamese population and compatible with French interests was the objective, and military conflict with a popular Viet Minh government a sure path to French entanglement and frustration. The events late 1946 and 1947 proved a test of these diametrically opposed beliefs about the relationship between force and political outcomes.

²³¹ Andre Martel, "Leclerc au tournant de l'Indochine (janvier-fevrier 1947)," *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 204 (September 1996), pp. 67.

²³² Raoul Salan, *Fin d'un Empire: Le Viêt-minh mon adversaire* (Paris: Press de la Cite, 1971), pp. 48.; *ibid.*, Gras, pp. 168-169.

First False Dawn: French Suppression of the Viet Minh Uprisings (1946)

The Viet Minh uprising in December 1946 provided a convenient test of the two models of counterinsurgency strategy in Indochina. For d'Argenlieu and his senior commander Valluy, the uprising was proof of the intrinsic flaws of cohabitation and an opportunity to restore real French control by force of arms. For Leclerc, the collapse of order first in Tonkin was the product of short sighted intransigence by d'Argenlieu. Far from restoring French control, the rupture was likely to provoke an interminable guerilla struggle in which French military force would prove inadequate.²³³ This dispute, which hinged on very different assessments of the balance of power, the role of mass politics, and the likely effects of military action, was a clear illustration of the clash of Models 1 and 3.

Leclerc, who had been approached by the French government as a potential replacement for d'Argenlieu as High Commissioner, painted a very bleak portrait of the Viet Minh uprising and its implications for French strategy. In his official inspection report, Leclerc highlighted the indivisibility of the military situation and the larger political problem:

The action by French troops charged, in this country, with the restoration of order and the protection of national interests, represents [only] one of the means available in the service of French government policy. It follows that the military problem cannot be isolated and treated separately. Under the current conditions, military operations do not represent an end [in themselves]. One cannot consider their development or their duration except as a function of the evolution of events and the political policy that will be pursued with respect to the Indochina question in broad terms.²³⁴

Leclerc went on to describe the tenuous state of French control in Tonkin and Annam.

While he noted that French control was considerably stronger in Cochinchina, he warned

²³³ Ibid., Bodinier, "Le général Leclerc et la négociation vietnamienne," pp. 72.

²³⁴ Général Leclerc, "Project de Rapport du Général Leclerc a MM. le Président du Conseil de la République Française, le Ministre de Défense Nationale, le Général d'Armée Chef de l'E.M.D.N., janvier 1947," in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 383-384.

that open war in Tonkin would increasingly degenerate into a guerilla campaign.²³⁵ As he had argued in the past, French military success only mattered in so far as it could be translated into a stable and acceptable political outcome. Leclerc flatly stated that the French policy of the previous ten months had ended in failure; performance in the next phase was uncertain and would be measured in the ability to achieve a political settlement as distinct from military victory.²³⁶ In closing, Leclerc returned to the political core of the problem and the perils of a strictly military response:

The Indochina problem is above all a *political problem*. It remains *unresolved*. If one wants to avoid a new Napoleonic war in Spain, or another Mexican expedition, it is *absolutely necessary to win the political contest* without delay.²³⁷

D'Argenlieu's estimate of the same situation was strikingly different. While he acknowledged that the French had yet to land "decisive blows" on the Viet Minh, d'Argenlieu argued that French forces had made substantial progress on both the military and political fronts: "I simply note that the political situation thus created bit by bit without spectacular raids or battles, will allow the people of Indochina to make themselves freely heard in a voice that will not be that of the Viet Minh."²³⁸ The High Commissioner noted that within the first month of the Viet Minh uprising they had managed to free most of the major garrisons in Indochina, restore movement along the Hanoi-Haiphong corridor, and regain operational initiative across Tonkin and central

²³⁵ Ibid., Leclerc, pp. 386.

²³⁶ Ibid., Leclerc, pp. 388-389.

²³⁷ Ibid., Leclerc, pp. 390 (italics in original text).

²³⁸ Amiral d'Argenlieu, "Télégramme de Haut-Commissaire de France pour l'Indochine, 1^{er} janvier 1947" in Gilbert Bodinier (e.d.), *La Guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954, Textes et Documents français et viêt-minh, Volume 2, Indochine 1947: Règlement politique ou solution militaire?* (Vincennes: Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, 1989), pp. 181.

Annam.²³⁹ According to d'Argenlieu, the military successes of the Expeditionary Corps had demonstrated the superiority of French arms:

In short, in one month, we have closed ranks, delivered rude blows to the enemy, and retaken the initiative everywhere. Certainly the effort to produce these results has been hard: the losses occasionally heavy and frequently the result of early surprises and inexperience, but clearly less severe as our men have begun to understand the enemy's tactics, his strengths and weaknesses. It is in this manner that over the past days, our superiority vis-à-vis the enemy army in the Hanoi sector has been clearly validated and demonstrated concretely by the capture of numerous prisoners and substantial stocks of materiel.

The effectiveness of our present action is a measure of the success of the [future] operations that we will be able to undertake once the anticipated reinforcements arrive.²⁴⁰

D'Argenlieu's assessment was a clear illustration of the small victories dynamic in action. Small battlefield successes were cumulative and were leading indicators of broader military and political success. Patience and reinforcements were the only missing ingredients of an effective French strategy.

General Valluy, Leclerc's successor as military commander in Indochina, shared d'Argenlieu's upbeat assessment of the counteroffensive and the potential for French success. Writing in May 1947 to d'Argenlieu's successor, High Commissioner Bollaert, Valluy argued that firm French reaction to the Viet Minh uprising had gone some way to reversing the confusion of the *modus vivendi* period. Valluy argued that the majority of the population was paralyzed by fear and insecurity; their only genuine desire was to live in peace and in the hopes of some positive improvement in their material livelihoods.²⁴¹ Leclerc's misguided courtship of the Viet Minh had led the people to regard the Viet Minh as a legitimate national government, and French forbearance had been taken by the

²³⁹ Amiral d'Argenlieu, "Note sur les operations en Indochine du nord du Decembre 1946 au 20 janvier 1947" in Bodinier, *Indochine 1947*, pp. 181

²⁴⁰ Ibid., d'Argenlieu, "Note sur les operations en Indochine du nord du decembre 1946 au 20 janvier 1947" in Bodinier, *Indochine 1947*, pp. 183.

²⁴¹ Général Valluy, "Fiche sur la situation en Cochinchina, Saigon, le 4 mai 1947" in Bodinier, *Indochine 1947*, pp. 191.

population as a sign of weakness.²⁴² While military action could not in and of itself deliver victory, Valluy suggested that continued military action alone could set the conditions for effective political action by French civil authorities:

Pure military action, by landing multiple blows on the rebel forces, by seeking out the destruction of their bases and supply depots, by inflicting elevated casualties, by making their lives as difficult as possible, by forcing them, at the start of monsoon season, to a precarious, has as its goal to create, among the rebel troops and their chiefs, lassitude and discouragement that can be exploited through political action to split the Viet Minh.²⁴³

For Valluy, the most important elements of an effective counterinsurgency strategy were firmness and clarity. The French could not afford to rekindle, through compromise, the aspirations of independence or unification that would inevitably lead to their “eviction.”²⁴⁴

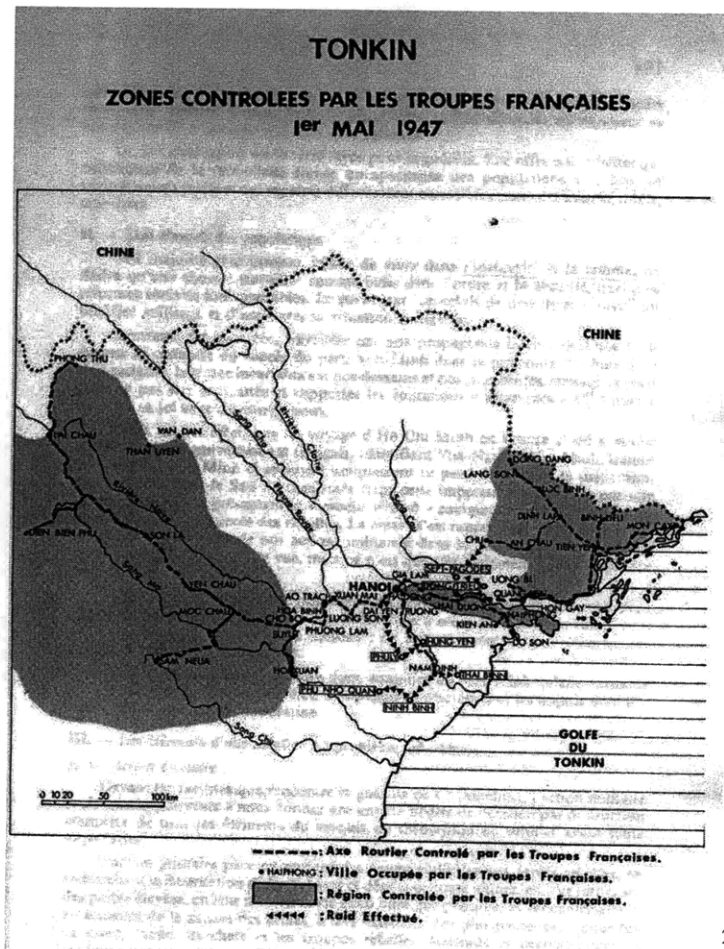
With the suppression of the Viet Minh uprisings essentially complete, the high command faced a choice of what do next. The French controlled the urban centers of Hanoi, Haiphong, Saigon and the major road arteries connecting them, and the thinly populated highlands of western and northeastern Tonkin. Outside these areas, French control was tenuous. The Viet Minh controlled most of the populous Red River delta south of Hanoi and Haiphong, and their government had retreated to the remote areas of

²⁴² Ibid., pp. 191.

²⁴³ Ibid., pp. 191.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 192.

upper Tonkin to direct a guerilla struggle against the colonial administration.



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With Leclerc's refusal to accept the post of High Commissioner, General Valluy proposed a conventional military campaign first to pacify the countryside and then to destroy the Viet Minh army. Peace could only be achieved by the clear demonstration of French power and authority. Valluy's articulation of his strategy offers a clear example of Model 1 reasoning:

General Valluy had his own idea of the way in which they must pursue "the restoration of order and a durable peace."...In contrast to the high Commissioner, who wanted to put an end to hostilities through negotiation, General Valluy believed that before negotiating they must first beat the Viet Minh, if not "all the conventions in the world would amount to nothing, the insurrection would restart and that rebellion would, sooner or later, expel us

²⁴⁵ This figure is drawn from Gilbert Bodinier (e.d.), *La Guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954, Textes et Documents français et viet-minh, Volume 2, Indochine 1947: Règlement politique ou solution militaire?* (Vincennes: Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, 1989), pp. 189.

definitively, completely and villainously from Indochina.” The insurgent movement that the Viet Minh maintained was, in his opinion, “of uneven depth” and “far from insurmountable.”

Le General Valluy proposed therefore as his objective to “seek the isolation of the Viet Minh front, followed by its disintegration. “ It would be necessary in the first place “to detach the Vietnamese masses from the effective head.” This would be reached “by demonstrating our material superiority and our will to triumph.” The Vietnamese masses, whose weak points were a “fundamental passivity” and an “extreme fickleness,” would conclude by “recognizing the uselessness of the current conflict and their powerlessness to drive out or defeat the French.” Lassitude would then overcome them and it would be possible to provoke the disintegration of the Viet Minh by inflicting “an obvious and definitive military defeat,” that would lead to discord between opposing camps, forcing the extremists to disappear or depriving them of their supporters.²⁴⁶

All the elements of the Model 1 are present in Valluy’s February plan: the primacy of force, the weakness of the insurgents, and the malleability of the population. The exercise of military force would cow the native population, setting the conditions for the decisive military defeat of the insurgents.

In February 1947, Valluy sketched out a two phase military plan. In the first phase, the French reinforcements dispatched in the wake of the December uprisings would be channeled into Cochinchina. The troops would launch a concerted campaign to pacify the south. Valluy expressed confidence that successful pacification in Cochinchina might be decisive. Pacification of the region was:

... the veritable touchstone of our capacity to resolve the [Indochina] problem...If, in the several months to come, we succeed in detaching Cochinchina from the rest of the war, we will have settled three quarters of the Indochina problem.²⁴⁷

Once French control in the south had been restored, Valluy proposed a direct assault on the Viet Minh government and army in northern Tonkin.

The Problem of Pacification

The spring pacification campaign in Cochinchina failed to meet Valluy’s optimistic expectations. In spite of the commitment of 38,000 regular troops, roughly

²⁴⁶ Yves Gras citing 10 February plan by General Valluy (Source: *ibid.*, Gras, pp. 177).

²⁴⁷ General Valluy as quoted in Gras, pp. 177.

40% of the French Expeditionary Corps and some 16,000 local partisans and paramilitary forces, the French failed to extinguish Viet Minh resistance in the southern countryside.

Pacification involved two related problems. Military commanders had first to uproot the Viet Minh guerillas and local Communist government. Once an area had been cleared of Viet Minh influence, the authorities had to reintroduce French colonial administration.

The first phase of pacification relied on offensive operations in the form of small patrols or larger cordon and search operations. These operations generally failed to deliver decisive results:

...the actions of the expeditionary force, whether ambitious, spectacular operations or small multiple missions combined with routine pacification, were often unsuccessful. In the case of the former, the preparations for operating the heavy artillery immediately alerted the enemy. There could be no element of surprise and however much equipment or however many troops were deployed, the area was rarely brought under total French control. In any operations it was always difficult to choose between speed, which prevented the thorough "cleansing" of the area, and the systematic "combing," which gave the insurgents time to disappear.²⁴⁸

Though the structure of the operational problem made contact with enemy troops unlikely, the results of any direct engagements heavily favored the counterinsurgent forces:

The difference in strength between the two sides at the time made any defeat inconceivable and the affair invariably ended with a dispatch such as the following:

"We have it from military sources that operations have been in progress for several days on the Plain of Reeds to the north of Cai Bé. Heavy losses have been inflicted on the supporters of Ho Chi Minh's government, who left 200 dead and abandoned a considerable amount of equipment in the field. A training center for officers was also destroyed. On the French side, a few losses have been notified – AFP."

A few "Viets" killed, some arms and equipment recovered, a favorable communiqué – it was easy for any military commander to undertake without much risk grand but ineffectual operations.²⁴⁹

Here then was the small victories dynamic imbedded in the structure of the rural pacification problem. Since the probability of meeting main units was low, the chances

²⁴⁸ Ibid., Dalloz, pp. 107.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., Dalloz, pp. 107-108.

of large scale success were low. But the certainty of victory in smaller encounters created the illusion of cumulative progress and encouraged the expenditure of additional resources and organizational energies in the pursuit of the ever elusive tipping point.

French efforts to hold their gains proved costly and frustrating. The default response, itself derived from nineteenth century pacification campaigns in the area, was to erect guard towers or outposts at close intervals throughout the cleared areas.²⁵⁰ In theory, these outposts could provide security, intelligence and contact with the population. In practice, they absorbed enormous numbers of troops and, in the absence of enthusiastic local support, often proved vulnerable to insurgent attack. Once under siege, neighboring French outposts had to weigh the benefits of relieving their comrades against the risks that ambushes would decimate the relief forces.²⁵¹

The few genuine successes of French pacification in the south owed more to the split between of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects from the Viet Minh movement than the government's efforts. The defection of the religious sects, brought on by Viet Minh terror tactics aimed at the control the groups and unseat their leaders, delivered sizable areas of Cochinchina to French control. In return for arms, French military support, and a measure of autonomy, the sects agreed to expel the Viet Minh and pledge allegiance to the French government.²⁵² This pattern was to be repeated on multiple occasions over the course of the war. Whether in the sect controlled areas of Cochinchina, the hill tribe areas of Tonkin, or the Catholic parishes of Tonkin,

²⁵⁰ Michel Bodin, "Le sous-secteur de Vinh Long, (mars 1947-août 1948)," *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 204 (September 1996), pp. 124-125.

²⁵¹ Lieutenant-colonel (ER) Hubert Tourret, "L'évolution de la tactique du corps expéditionnaire français en extrême-orient" in *L'Armée française dans la guerre d'Indochine (1946-1954): adaptation ou inadaptation?* (Vincennes: Centre des Études d'Histoire de la défense, 2000), pp. 175-176.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, Gras, pp. 217-221.

pacification generally succeeded where local populations harbored an existing, identity based antipathy towards the Viet Minh. French pacification was far less successful where such animus was absent. Without the seed crystal of ethnic or religious identity, the French found it difficult to suppress Viet Minh guerillas and local government.

The Search for Decisive Battle: Decapitation Strike in Tonkin (Fall 1947)

By early summer it was clear to Valluy and his subordinates that the pacification campaign in Cochinchina had fallen short. While they had bested the enemy in every tactical engagement, and had benefited from the defection of the religious sects to the French cause, they had failed to take the Cochinchina out of the rebellion. In July 1947, Valluy addressed the failure in a directive to his senior commanders. In it he stressed the inadequacy of traditional French pacification methods, the colonial inheritance of Gallieni and Lyautey. Faced with a determined, centralized, and ideologically motivated opponent, the French needed to do two things to succeed. First, they needed to strike at the head of the enemy movement – the Viet Minh government and regular army units. Second, they needed to provide an alternative centralized, hierarchical order around which the Vietnamese people could rally.²⁵³

Pointing to the success of more modest conventional operations in Tonkin during the spring,²⁵⁴ Valluy suggested that a more conventional decapitation strike on the Viet Minh government might deliver the results that had so far eluded them in the south. In a reversal of his earlier logic, Valluy argued that the destruction of the Viet Minh army

²⁵³ General Valluy, "Commandement Superior des Troupes françaises en extrême-orient aux commandants, Saigon, le 23 juillet 1947" in Bodinier, *Indochine 1947*, pp. 302-303.

²⁵⁴ Operations Georges and Papillon and were the two largest of these operations. French successes in re-establishing control in both areas fueled enthusiasm for similar operations in the coming months (Source: Gras, pp. 181-182).

would set the conditions for successful pacification. Valluy acknowledged in later writings that his decision to turn from pacification to decapitation was motivated by the impending redeployment of 15,000 of the French forces now at his disposal. A revolt in the French colony of Madagascar and waning parliamentary enthusiasm for the war were the driving forces behind this impending withdrawal, and this left a narrow window in which to land a decisive blow:

One thing appears certain, and it is that we will lose more than 15,000 whites [European troops], from the first half of 1948 onward, and that this loss will not be compensated by the arrival of 5,000 Senegalese...²⁵⁵

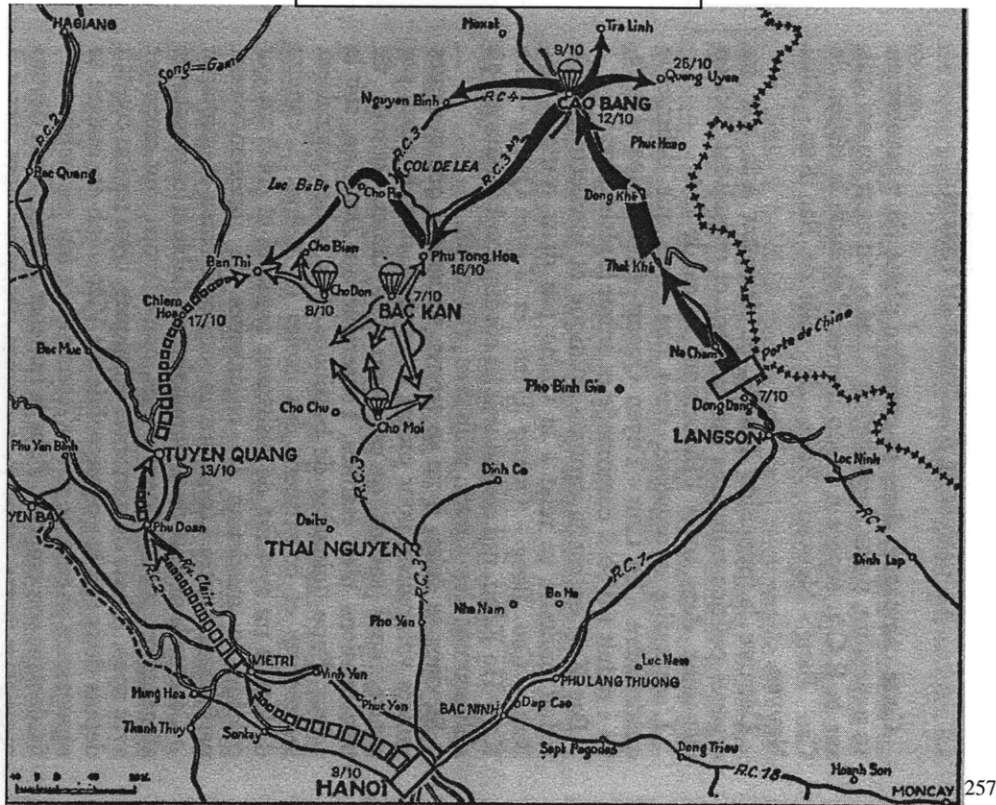
If the French were to strike a concentrated blow at the head of the Viet Minh government, they had to do so in the fall of 1947.²⁵⁶

Valluy's plan, which was to mature into Operations Lea and Ceinture, envisioned an attack the Viet Minh government and army in its remote sanctuaries in northern Tonkin. Valluy planned to isolate and destroy the Viet Minh apparatus in northern Tonkin. Airborne troops would be dropped on Bac Kan, the headquarters of the Viet Minh government, to ensure surprise and deliver the initial punch. Two French columns, an armored one driving northwest along the Chinese border from Lang Son to Cao Bang and an amphibious one would pushing north from Hanoi along the Clear and Song Ga rivers, would relieve the airborne forces at Bac Kan and surround the Viet Minh.

²⁵⁵ "Note pour le G n super sur la conduite d'op rations possibles, Saigon, le 22 octobre 1947," in Bodinier, *Indochine 1947*, pp. 315.

²⁵⁶ Generale Valluy, "Note mauscrite du g n ral Valluy au sujet de l'operation Ho Chi Minh 15 juillet 1947," in Bodinier, *Indochine 1947*, pp. 301.

Operation "Lea"



Once the forces had reached their initial objectives, they would sweep through the sector attacking all enemy forces and destroying Viet Minh supply bases and factories. The isolation and destruction of the Viet Minh main body was the immediate goal. Once in place, the French hoped to sever the Viet Minh supply lines running into China and the Red River Delta.²⁵⁸ Operation Ceinture was to be the follow on operation. In Ceinture, French forces would continue to push south towards Hanoi, hoping to trap the remnants of the Viet Minh regular forces.

Judged solely on the basis of the performance of French troops, Operation Lea was a success. The French achieved tactical surprise in their October 7 airborne drops on Bac Kan, narrowly missing an opportunity to capture the senior Viet Minh leaders. The

²⁵⁷ This map is drawn from Salan's *Le Viêt-minh mon adversaire*, pp. 102.

²⁵⁸ Général Valluy, "Instruction personnelle et secrète pour le Général Commandant les T.F.I.N." in Bodinier, *Indochine 1947*, pp. 305.

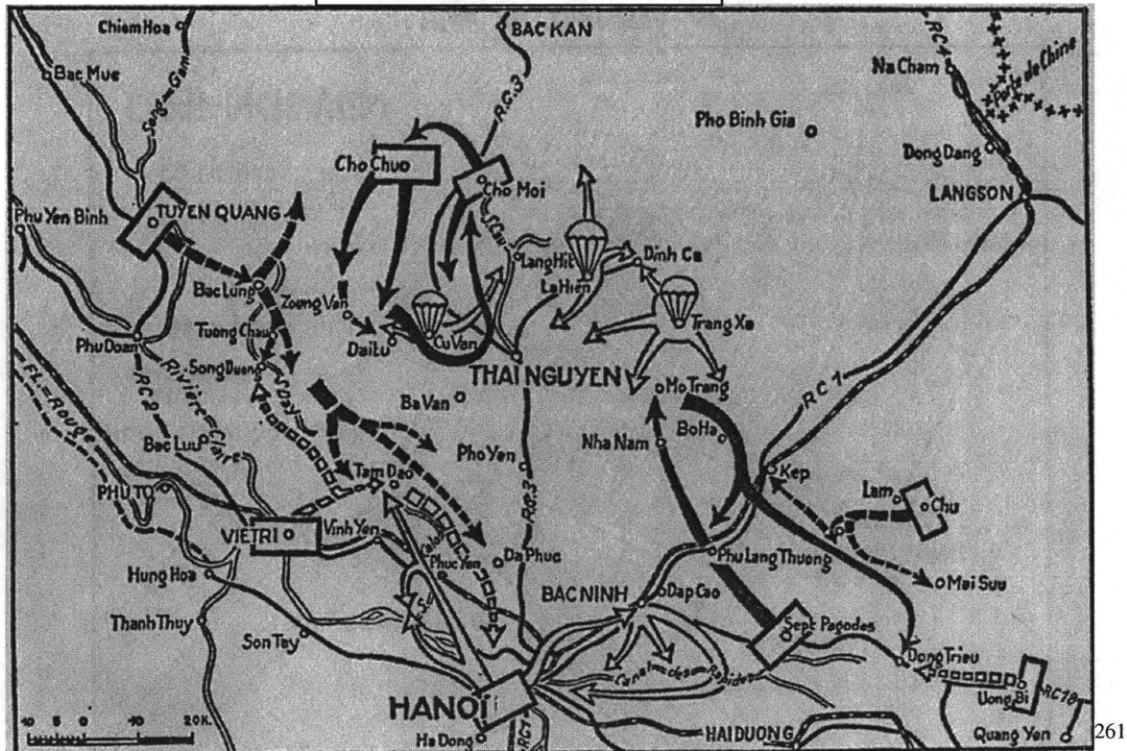
armored push from Langson to Cao Bang had to overcome tremendous physical obstacles to meet the specified timeline. By feats of engineering, they closed on Cao Bang and turned south to relieve the paratroopers. The amphibious group encountered more serious delays and was forced to move on foot to complete their drive north. Nevertheless, within the space of 10 days, the French had managed to strike the Viet Minh headquarters and push some 12,000 troops into what had been the enemy's central stronghold.²⁵⁹

The results of the sweep south were less conclusive. While the French pushed through the Viet Minh area and sought to rally the local population in the cleared areas,²⁶⁰ they did not inflict the crushing military blow they had sought. Unwilling to meet superior French forces in open battle, the Viet Minh army broke into company sized elements and filtered south.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., Salan, pp. 109.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., Salan, pp. 109-110.

Operation "Ceinture"



Operation Ceinture (19 November -10 December 1947), the push south from the Tonkin highlands towards Hanoi, produced similar results. While French forces won numerous small engagements and captured or destroyed large quantities of enemy food and munitions, they did not manage to force any large conventional engagements. As the official after action report indicated, pursuit in the forested and mountainous terrain of upper Tonkin proved enormously challenging:

For this reason [the French imitation of Viet Minh light infantry tactics] and in spite of traps laid along the paths, our detachments maintained the operational initiative everywhere; unfortunately in covered terrain, they could not generally force combat on the enemy and in practical terms the pursuit proved impossible with the adversary simply dissolving into the forest.²⁶²

²⁶¹ This figure is drawn from Salan, *Le Viêt-minh mon adversaire*, pp. 111.

²⁶² Commandement des troupes françaises d'Indochine du nord, état-major, "La campagne d'automne au Tonkin" in Bodinier, *Indochine 1947*, pp. 339.

By the end of Ceinture in mid-December 1947, the French had splintered the Viet Minh force but had not defeated it.²⁶³ The French command estimated that the Viet Minh had lost 1,500 tons of munitions which, according to captured Viet Minh documents, represented close to two thirds of their total stocks. The French estimated that the Viet Minh had lost close to 8,200 troops in the two operations.²⁶⁴ The French had swept through the Viet Minh sanctuaries and had re-established a string of outposts along the Chinese border, but lacked the forces to maintain a permanent presence in the area. In spite of the mixed results, the after action review closed on a triumphal note, arguing that the French forces had managed to call the “Viet Minh bluff (of its ‘government,’ and its ‘army’) [revealing] its real level, that of a terrorist and dissident political party.”²⁶⁵

While senior French leaders acknowledged that the operations had yet to deliver victory on the campaign level, they saw little need to change strategic course. The troops of the Expeditionary Corps had driven the Viet Minh government into hiding and broken their regular army into company sized elements. It stood to reason that similar efforts, executed on a greater scale and with the benefit of experience, would deliver even greater results. General Valluy and his senior ground commander, General Salan, commissioned an extensive study of the 1947 operations in an effort to glean tactical and operational insights that might be applied in future operations. The lessons learned effort was self-congratulatory in tone and almost exclusively tactical and operational in focus.²⁶⁶ If the operations had failed to secure complete victory, the real problem was insufficient forces and time. General Salan, who had boasted to the High Commissioner in September 1947

²⁶³ Vo Nguyen Giap, “Ordres de Vo Nguyen Giap a la suite de l’offensive française en Haute et Moyenne Regions,” in Bodinier, *Indochine 1947*, pp. 325-328.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., Fall, pp. 30.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., “La campagne d’automne au Tonkin, le 27 octobre 1947,” in Bodinier, *Indochine 1947*, pp. 341.

²⁶⁶ For a full account of this effort, see Salan, pp. 115-117.

that he needed only three weeks to “crush the head” of the Viet Minh argued after the fact that time and manpower had been the only real obstacles to a more definitive outcome:

On a military level, [the operations were] incontestably effective. It is equally certain that would have been more complete if the operations had been extended for an additional month. The dispatch of four battalions to the south, by forcing the premature withdrawal of the units engaged, interrupted the progress of a campaign whose success could scarcely have failed to be even more decisive on a military level and above all on a political level.²⁶⁷

Valluy and Salan were in agreement that the fall offensives in Tonkin had been successful and had broken the back of the Viet Minh regular forces. In his report to Valluy dated November 17, Salan flatly noted that “Territory held by the Viet Minh has now almost ceased to exist. It has been fragmented and its most important areas have been wiped out.”²⁶⁸ As Valluy put it, “at the end of 1947, this Viet Minh army, reduced to leading the errant life of partisans and pirates, no longer represented a means of pressure on the political level.” If work remained, it was more a matter of refinement and escalation than the development of new strategies. With more forces, more time, and improved execution, French military leaders were confident they could grind the Viet Minh into insignificance.

Marginal Civilian Involvement (1947-1950)

While the French civil authorities were eager to see the Indochina problem resolved, their practical impact on counterinsurgency strategy was minimal. The political upheavals and deep ideological divisions of French Fourth Republic (21 governments

²⁶⁷ General Salan as quoted in Gras, pp. 207.

²⁶⁸ General Salan as quoted in Dalloz, pp. 96-97.

over the course of the Indochina war)²⁶⁹ made major policy changes unlikely. Unwilling to concede the basic French claims to control in Indochina, but hesitant to commit scarce French resources to an expansion of the war effort, successive French governments clung to the notion that modest French military efforts would, over time, lead to a positive outcome. Pierre Mendès-France, speaking to the Chamber of Deputies in November 1950, aptly summarized the disconnect between French strategy and policy:

The whole concept of our action in Indochina is wrong, because it is based both on a military effort which is insufficient and incapable of bringing about a solution by force and on a policy which is insufficient and incapable of ensuring us the support of the local population. It is a fact that our forces, even with the support of local units, cannot achieve a military solution, especially since the developments in China, and it is a fact that our policy of unsatisfactory concessions, constantly re-defined or revoked, has not achieved and will, alas, increasingly fail to achieve the rallying of the Vietnamese masses.²⁷⁰

While the tension between French aims and the strategies employed was increasingly obvious, no French government before 1954 was willing to concede the major issues and confront the military. The path of least resistance for a weak and divided political elite was to back the generals and cling to expansive and increasingly unachievable ends.

The volatility of French domestic politics meant that any meaningful civilian input to French strategy would have to come from the High Commissioners. On several occasions between 1947 and 1950, civilian high commissioners did attempt to change French strategy. When these changes clashed with the senior military commanders' priorities, the High Commissioners generally lost.

The clash between High Commissioner Émile Bollaert and Valluy in the spring and summer of 1947 demonstrates the clear dominance of military leaders over both political strategy and military strategy in Indochina. In their formal instructions to the

²⁶⁹ Hugues Tertrais, *La piastre et le fusil: Le coût de la guerre d'Indochine, 1945-1954* (Paris: Comité pour l'histoire économique et financière de la France, 2002), pp. 519; George Armstrong Kelly, *Lost Soldiers: The French Army and Empire in Crisis 1947-1962* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965), pp. 55.

²⁷⁰ Pierre Mendès-France as quoted in Dalloz, pp. 134.

incoming High Commissioner, the government of Prime Minister Paul Ramadier encouraged him to use French military advantage to explore political negotiations:

During the test of force that was imposed on us, our supremacy was affirmed. We can therefore search for a political solution, that we have always had in view in any case, by negotiating with the Vietnamese government or governments.²⁷¹

Accordingly, Bollaert responded to tentative Viet Minh ceasefire proposals sent in April 1947 by began to draw up the terms of a cease-fire agreement.

The suggestion that the French authorities might negotiate with the Viet Minh sparked strong opposition among the military leadership. After having defeated the Viet Minh uprising, Valluy and his subordinates did not want to remove the pressure on the insurgents by returning to some cloudy *modus vivendi*. Valluy therefore insisted on that the ceasefire proposal include at least five conditions: 1) the surrender within 15 days of substantial stocks of military materiel, 2) the immediate cessation of all hostilities to include political propaganda and terrorism, 3) the immediate release of all hostages and prisoners of war, 4) the transfer of French and Japanese deserters, and 5) complete freedom of movement for French forces throughout Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina.²⁷² Valluy's harsh conditions made Viet Minh acceptance nearly impossible.²⁷³ Bollaert's adviser Paul Mus presented the terms to the Viet Minh leadership and was promptly rebuffed.²⁷⁴

As Valluy concluded his pacification campaign in Cochinchina and prepared to launch the autumn offensive in Tonkin, Bollaert made a second and bolder attempt to

²⁷¹ "Instructions pour Monsieur le Haut-Commissaire de France en Indochine, 27 mars 1947," in Bodinier, *Indochine 1947*, pp. 237.

²⁷² Ibid., Gras, pp. 173.

²⁷³ Ibid., Gras, pp. 173; *ibid.*, Dalloz, pp. 85.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., Gras, pp. 173; *ibid.*, Dalloz, pp. 85.

open negotiations with the Viet Minh. Bollaert proposed to announce a unilateral ceasefire whose duration would depend on reciprocal concessions by the Viet Minh. This plan, no matter what its specific substance, was a direct threat to Valluy's plan for a decisive strike in Tonkin. Valluy flew to Paris to register his strong opposition to Bollaert's plan and lobby in favor of his Tonkin operations.²⁷⁵ Valluy argued that the Viet Minh were reeling and must not be offered a premature respite. According to Valluy, it would be far better to postpone peace negotiations until after the conclusion of the planned autumn offensives than to risk forfeiting the gains of the recent French military actions. The Ramadier government, confronted with the strong objections of the senior French military commander, recalled Bollaert to Paris. The compromise solution that emerged proposed negotiations with the deposed Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai to set up an independent, non-Communist Vietnamese government. This shift effectively ended Bollaert's bid to open negotiations with the Viet Minh and guaranteed the execution of Operations Lea and Ceinture.

Whether Bollaert or Valluy had the stronger case on negotiations in 1947 remains an open question. What is relatively clear is that senior military commanders were hostile to any return to negotiation; they were both capable and willing to block moves by the High Commissioner and even the Paris government to pursue such options. Whether by poison pill as in the case of the May proposals or by direct opposition as in the case of Bollaert's unilateral cease-fire proposal, Valluy managed to stymie moves by senior political authorities to pursue political projects that jeopardized military plans.

Though direct confrontation of the kind seen between Bollaert and Valluy was relatively rare, it became relatively common for High Commissioners and French military

²⁷⁵ Ibid., Gras, pp. 184.

commanders to be at odds over fundamental questions of military strategy. Whether it was a question of the appropriate regional priority of effort or the advisability of escalation, most conflicts ended with military prerogatives intact. Very seldom did senior civilians manage to block or reverse decisions made by senior military commanders.

Unable or unwilling to confront the Indochina military command directly, French governments expressed their anxiety about Indochina by dispatching prominent general officers on formal inspection tours of the theater. Starting with the Leclerc report of 1947 and followed by General Revers' report in 1949 and General Juin's report in October 1951, French governments used this tactic to garner expert opinion, maintain political cover, and refine strategy and policy.²⁷⁶ In practice, this approach was ineffective. Local military leaders tended to implement recommendations that fit their strategies and ignore those that conflicted. While civilian policy makers may have improved their understanding of the Indochina, the indirect approach to civilian control did nothing to impose heterodox solutions on the local command.

The Revers report illustrates both the promise and the profound limitations of the formal inspection tour approach. Sent in May 1949 to evaluate French military and political progress in Indochina, General Revers and his inspection team spent a month interviewing countless French and Vietnamese notables, civilian as well as military. Revers' conclusions, laid out in a 190 page formal report to the government, were damning. Contradicting the local command's upbeat interpretation of the war, Revers argued that French control in Tonkin was extremely limited:

²⁷⁶ Frédéric Turpin, "Cao Bang, automne 1950: autopsie d'un désastre," *Revue historique des armées*, No. 220 (September 2000), pp. 26-28.

We do not control any province in which the pacification could be considered to be going well. We hold Hanoi-Haiphong solidly, and more poorly the road and the rail line emanating from these two centers. We have absolutely no hold on the [Red River] delta.²⁷⁷

Revers went on to catalogue a series of profound French weaknesses in Tonkin. The dispersion of troops across countless outposts²⁷⁸ and border forts left the command open to attack by both the Viet Minh and the largely unknown Chinese Communist forces to the north.²⁷⁹ The French Expeditionary Corps was ill prepared to deal with the problem. Manpower shortfalls and worn out military equipment left many French units unfit for sustained combat with major enemy forces.²⁸⁰ Even when French commanders could locate the enemy and mount substantial offensive operations, the results were more illusory than real:

From time to time an operation is mounted, we capture some [enemy] matériel, which enables us to say that the war potential of the enemy has been reduced.²⁸¹

Revers blunt appraisal of the military situation drew into question the core assumption underpinning French conventional strategy in Indochina: the notion that small military victories contributed to cumulative progress, and that French investments from December 1946 through the summer of 1949 had indeed produced meaningful results on the campaign level.

Revers' critique of the broader military and political policy was no less trenchant. Breaking with both the French government and the local military command, Revers argued that the Bao Dai solution was effectively bankrupt. While the French had promised to transfer meaningful authority to the government of the Associated States, the

²⁷⁷ General Revers as cited in D. Domergue-Cloarec, "La mission et le rapport Revers," *Guerres Mondiales et conflits contemporains*, No. 148 (octobre 1987), pp. 104.

²⁷⁸ D. Domergue-Cloarec, "La mission et le rapport Revers," *Guerres Mondiales et conflits contemporains*, No. 148 (octobre 1987), pp. 107.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, D. Domergue-Cloarec, pp. 105.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, D. Domergue-Cloarec, pp. 107.

²⁸¹ General Revers as cited in D. Domergue-Cloarec, pp. 105.

new government was weak, corrupt, under-resourced and incapable of administering the territories. In practice, French authorities had imposed a direct colonial administration even more onerous and less inclusive than the one in place in the prewar era.²⁸² The notion that the ersatz government of Bao Dai could provide an appealing alternative for Vietnamese nationalists was . The weakness of the Bao Dai regime had practical consequences in the context of a French strategy predicated on burden sharing. Though the French command had argued that the new Vietnamese army might assume an increasing share of the wartime missions in Indochina, Revers was deeply skeptical. He argued that the new forces lacked the cohesion and training to confront their Viet Minh opponents and that most missions were simply beyond their capability.²⁸³

Revers used these observations as a basis for a series of specific recommendations on future French strategy and policy. On an operational level, he argued that the French should pull back from their exposed positions along the northern border with China and establish a defense in depth in the Red River delta.²⁸⁴ On the policy front, Revers recommended a complete overhaul of the French system of command. In order to avoid future deadlock between the High Commissioner and the Génésuper,²⁸⁵ Revers proposed the appointment of a Generalissimo capable of forging a coherent French strategy.²⁸⁶ On the political level, Revers argued that France had to move rapidly from de facto colonial rule to real Vietnamese self-rule:

²⁸² Ibid., D. Domergue-Cloarec, pp. 105.

²⁸³ Ibid., D. Domergue-Cloarec, pp. 108-109.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., D. Domergue-Cloarec, pp. 109.

²⁸⁵ The paralytic standoff between the then High Commissioner Pignon and the Génésuper Blaizot had been one of the primary motives behind the Revers' mission.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., D. Domergue-Cloarec, pp. 106.

What we must avoid is the impression that we want to slow down or avoid the creation of this [Bao Dai] administration and that we simply want to retain for the benefit of France a direct [colonial] administration that would contradict the terms of our accords.²⁸⁷

Reactions to this sweeping indictment of French policy and strategy were telling. Military leaders were unanimous in embracing Revers' call for additional materiel and manpower. Similarly, Revers' proposal that a senior military be placed in charge of all civil and military affairs was warmly received. This recommendation, whatever its intrinsic validity, was deeply ironoic; a mission designed in part to address the breakdown of civil-military cooperation, and endorsed by senior civilian leaders, ended with a further official dilution of civil authority in Indochina. Military opinion was split on the operational question of a pull back from the Chinese border. While the French General Staff in Paris and some senior commanders in Indochina embraced the logic of a withdrawal to the delta, General Alessandri and others effectively blocked this recommendation by citing the lack of immediate pressure and the potential for loss of face. More disturbing still, the political aspects of Revers' critique were essentially ignored. Neither the civilian government nor the senior military command in Indochina addressed the intrinsic flaws of the Bao Dai arrangement. Rather than transferring real authority to the Vietnamese government, French leaders continued with the fiction that *de jure* local sovereignty and rapid expansion of the Vietnamese army were the building blocks of a long term solution to the rebellion in Indochina. The selective adoption of the recommendations of Revers was representative of the *de facto* dominance of military leadership in Indochina and their ability to resist pressure from civilian and even metropolitan military leaders.

²⁸⁷ General Revers as cited in D. Domergue-Cloarec, pp. 109.

The image that emerges from this period is one of clear military dominance over decision making on strategy in Indochina. Civilian leaders in Paris pursued a policy of minimal engagement; they dictated the level of forces dispatched into the theater and responded to requests for reinforcements by dispatching some fraction of the number requested. Indirect efforts to influence policy through the use of official inspection tours, most notably in the Revers report of 1949, generally failed. Military leaders accepted the proposals that were consonant with their view of the problem and ignored proposals that were not. They seldom attempted and never succeeded in imposing major changes in strategy over the objections of senior military commanders.

Operational Experimentation and Innovation (1946-1950)

Between 1947 and 1950, the French developed a number of novel and effective operational concepts. With the exception of the ongoing refinement of the outpost system of pacification, these innovations were focused on offensive operations in pursuit of the enemy main force units or in support of offensive pacification sweeps. The innovations and refinements of this period produced major advances in French operational and tactical mobility across a number of different types of terrain.

The paratroopers of the French expeditionary corps became both the primary offensive striking force and the defensive fire brigades of the war effort from 1948 on. In the absence of any enemy air threat, airborne operations enabled the French to insert elite, light infantry formations into even the most forbidding terrain on short notice.²⁸⁸ The French airborne force in Indochina was tiny in the opening phase of the war. From a base

²⁸⁸ Howard R. Simpson, *The Paratroopers of the French Foreign Legion, From Vietnam to Bosnia* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1997), pp. 9.

of several hundred troops in 1946, the airborne force grew to 5,700 by 1950 and 10,600 in 1951.²⁸⁹ The rapid expansion reflected the growing French reliance on airborne operations to offset the numerical inferiority and limited mobility of French forces in the field.

The second major innovation was the development of large scale amphibious formations. French units engaged in pacification sweeps in Cochinchina in 1948 recognized the utility of amphibious vehicles in the rice paddies and swamps of the south. By 1949, the French had created two squadrons composed of a mix of unarmored jeep sized vehicles (29C Crabs) and larger armored amphibious tractors (LVT4 alligators).²⁹⁰ By the war's end, the units had grown into amphibian equivalent of combat commands, integrating reconnaissance elements, lightly armored personnel carriers carrying infantry and machine guns, and light artillery.²⁹¹ These amphibian units proved enormously useful in pursuing Viet Minh units in terrain crisscrossed with flooded fields and small rivers. Whether used as independent battalions or in conjunction with airborne units, the amphibian units greatly increased French mobility in the deltas of Tonkin and Cochinchina.²⁹²

The successful use of amphibious landing craft in the reconquest of Cochinchina in 1945 led the French navy to develop large riverine units built around an assortment of troop carrying landing craft and heavy weapons carrying monitors.²⁹³ These naval assault divisions, the *Dinassauts*, were used to move troops and heavy weapons along the

²⁸⁹ Ibid., Tourret, pp. 185.

²⁹⁰ General de corps d'armée Alain Bizard, "Adaptation de l'armée blindée a la guerre d'Indochine" in *L'Armée française dans la guerre d'Indochine*, pp. 257-258.

²⁹¹ Colonel (Ret.) V. J. Croizat (tr.), *A Translation from the French Lessons of the War in Indochina, Volume 2* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, May 1967), RM-5271-PR, pp. 266-267.

²⁹² Ibid., pp. 267.

²⁹³ Ibid., Fall, pp. 44.

extensive river networks of northern and southern Vietnam. First deployed in 1947, they grew considerably in complexity over the course of the war. Most *Dinassauts* included a mix of locally armored landing craft filling a range of roles from assault landing, fire support, command and control to minesweeping.²⁹⁴ Over the course of the war, the French developed a number of armor and armament modifications to better suit the evolving Viet Minh threat and the peculiarities of riverine warfare. The standard *Dinassaut* formations could be task organized to suit the particular mission. *Dinassauts* proved extremely useful two basic missions: the rapid insertion and support of infantry forces and more general logistical support. The U.S. military would later model their own riverine forces in the Second Indochina War on the *Dinassaut* formations developed by the French and later transferred to the Vietnamese navy.

The airborne forces, amphibious, and riverine units all represented new tools developed to enhance the operational mobility of French military forces. Even more impressive than these specific tools were the French advances in the combined and joint employment of the range of military assets at their disposal. Whether in conventional operations such as *Lea* or *Ceinture*, or in large scale pacification operations, the French managed to integrate the efforts of multiple arms in difficult terrain. In large encirclement operations, the French often knitted together multiple maneuver forces - infantry, armored units, amphibious and riverine units – and multiple forms of fire support – artillery, air support and naval gunfire. Their growing facility in these combined arms actions helped them maintain important qualitative advantages in direct engagements with the Viet Minh into 1953 and 1954.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., Croizat, pp. 349-351.

In order to secure the gains of their pacification sweeps, the French developed a dense network of outposts and watchtowers. As noted earlier, these posts were supposed to serve as the focal points of the French occupation of reclaimed territories. The posts began as simple and largely unfortified structures but grew in complexity and cost as the siege weaponry available to the Viet Minh grew.²⁹⁵

In short, the first four years of the war saw considerable innovation on the operational level. Faced with the task of pacification and large unit combat across a number of different types of terrain, the French developed a host of operational innovations aimed at improving the mobility and combat effectiveness of their forces. These innovations would provide the French with important tactical advantages for much of the Indochina war.

The problem was that marginal improvements and even genuine innovations at the operational level tended to divert attention from strategy. So long as the refinement of conventional combat routines, or dispatch of additional troops, were considered valid and promising responses to the Viet Minh threat, there was no need to address the weak connection between battlefield victories and political outcomes. Exploitation was too often a substitute for sound strategy.

²⁹⁵ For a detailed treatment of the evolution of French posts and field fortifications, see Croizat, pp. 116-142.

Phase 3: Conventional Defeat and Conventional Resurrection: The Viet Minh

Offensives of 1950 and de Lattre's Riposte

In October 1950, the French suffered a stunning defeat at the hands of a new Viet Minh army trained, supplied and advised by the Chinese Communists. The destruction of the French forces at Cao Bang, the loss of 6,000 troops and the string of French border forts along the Chinese frontier, left the French Expeditionary Corps in total disarray at the close of 1950. This clear defeat did not provoke a move beyond conventional response. Instead, the new French commander, General de Lattre, sought to restore the French position by conventional reorganization and an expansion of manpower and materiel. De Lattre's charismatic leadership, and the premature Viet Minh decision to launch a series of ground attacks on French positions in the Red River Delta in 1951, produced three major French victories and seemed to validate a revitalized Model 1 solution. The events of 1950 and 1951, conventional defeat, conventional response, and conventional validation, demonstrate the fundamental indeterminacy of defeat. The disaster at Cao Bang may have unhinged the French command, but it did not prompt extensive strategic search. The conventional response and conventional victories of 1951 pushed any meaningful search for alternative strategy further into the future.

The Chinese Revolution and the Closing Window of Opportunity (1948-1950)

From 1947 through the fall of 1950, the French command continued to wrestle with the problems of large unit war and pacification. General Valluy's two phase offensive of 1947 was repeated in various forms as subsequent French commanders

sought to end the Viet Minh insurgency either through direct attack on the Viet Minh government and regular units in Tonkin or the gradual clearance and consolidation of the densely populated areas of the Red River and Mekong deltas.²⁹⁶ These operations invariably produced the same mixed results; the French won almost every tactical engagement but were unable to translate their obvious advantages in conventional battle into decisive and durable outcomes on the campaign level. Pacification sweeps, whether in Cochinchina, Annam or Tonkin, were frustratingly slow but generally forced Viet Minh forces out of the area for a time. Holding these gains proved far more difficult. As Jean-Pierre Dannaud, a contemporary observer noted, French control was often largely illusory:

During the day, of course, we saw nothing, we moved around as we wished in the towns, on the roads. We carried out operations in the rice paddies, operations of the road rally genre, with artillery, amphibious vehicles, close air support, the paras who turned up one after another at the appointed hour, to smash the crust [of enemy resistance]. We concluded that with a number of mobile groups we could still move from Lang Son to Ca Mau if we were so inclined. But if our senior leaders had spent one hour of the night in the field with some partisans, they would have understood that, even during the day without doubt, we did not hold the country, we held the outposts. And these outposts held the country as securely as thumbtacks attach a map to a table.²⁹⁷

On the second front, that of conventional battle, results were promising but equally ephemeral. As General Yves Gras has noted, the French continued to chase the elusive final battle that would deliver the collapse of the rebellion and peace on French terms:

The French command had never completely abandoned its initial idea of eliminating the Viet Minh by a direct engagement against its principal stronghold in Tonkin. From time to time, it launched raids of varying depth in the oft thwarted hope of destroying the Viet Minh forces or at the very least their infrastructure. But they always determined that they lacked the few thousand men necessary to deliver the decisive blow.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ For a discussion of this basic strategic impasse see Gras, pp. 243-248.

²⁹⁷ Dannaud in Tourret, pp. 177-178.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., Gras, pp. 309; Bernard Fall makes essentially the same point in *Street Without Joy*: "For the French, the search for the big set-piece battle in which they could outmaneuver and outgun the enemy, began then [in Operations Lea and Ceinture]. It was to end seven years later, when they found a set piece battle in a small mountain valley whose...Vietnamese name was Dien Bien Phu." (Source: Fall, pp. 31).

For a command firmly wedded to the conventional military strategy, local successes and campaign stalemate invariably elicited earnest calls for additional reinforcements in the assumption that escalation could crush the revolt.

Starting in 1949, the advance of the Chinese Communist armies towards the borders of Tonkin introduced a new and unwelcome dimension to the French problem in Indochina. These armies might provide indirect or direct support to the Viet Minh forces that had hitherto lacked substantial external sponsors. The window for a clear resolution to the conflict appeared to be closing. The dispatch of additional French reinforcements in 1949 and 1950 in response to the pessimistic appraisal of General Revers prompted a last push to secure Tonkin in advance of the Chinese arrival. Though the senior commander in 1949 and 1950, General Carpentier, was cautious about the prospects for rapid French victory, the commander of ground forces in Tonkin, General Alessandri, pushed for a final pacification of the Red River delta.²⁹⁹ In a series of operationally successful operations, Alessandri employed some 40 French battalions to drive the Viet Minh forces out of most of the Red River delta, an area they had dominated for the first four years of the war. Alessandri's successes promised for the first time in the war to cut the Viet Minh off from their principal source of food and deliver the French control over the bulk of the northern Vietnamese population.³⁰⁰

French progress in Tonkin was to prove fleeting. The arrival of Chinese forces on the borders of Tonkin dramatically changed the terms of the conflict. While some French commanders had entertained the notion that they might cooperate with the new Chinese government, it soon became clear that the Chinese were prepared to extend massive aid

²⁹⁹ Ibid., Turpin, pp. 28-29.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., Gras, pp. 294-298.

to the Viet Minh regime. In 1950, as the French worked to wrest control of the Red River delta from the Viet Minh, the Chinese transferred some 4,000 tons of aid to the insurgents including over 1,000 tons of military supplies.³⁰¹ Whatever advantage the French had gained by cutting the Viet Minh off from their traditional sources of Chinese weapons and Red River rice was more than offset by the large scale assistance of the Chinese Communist regime.³⁰² In addition to this material aid, the Chinese set up training camps inside that churned out 20,000 trained infantry between May and September 1949.³⁰³ These trainees were to form the basis of four new and fully equipped Viet Minh divisions that would soon be committed to the war in Tonkin.³⁰⁴

Chinese aid was not limited to material assistance or training. From 1950 through the end of the Indochina War, Chinese military advisers were involved to varying degrees in the planning of most major Viet Minh offensives.³⁰⁵ Chen Geng, the senior Chinese advisor, developed the first of these offensives in an effort to break the French hold on the border region and establish secure supply routes into Tonkin. Chen personally drew up the plan and reportedly delivered it to Vietnamese general Giap for execution.³⁰⁶

³⁰¹ Christopher E. Goscha, "L'aide militaire chinoise au Viet-minh (1949-1954)," *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 220 (September 2000), pp. 18; Qiang Zhai, "Transplanting the Chinese Model: Chinese Military Advisers and the First Vietnam War, 1950-1954," *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 57 (October 1993), pp. 714.

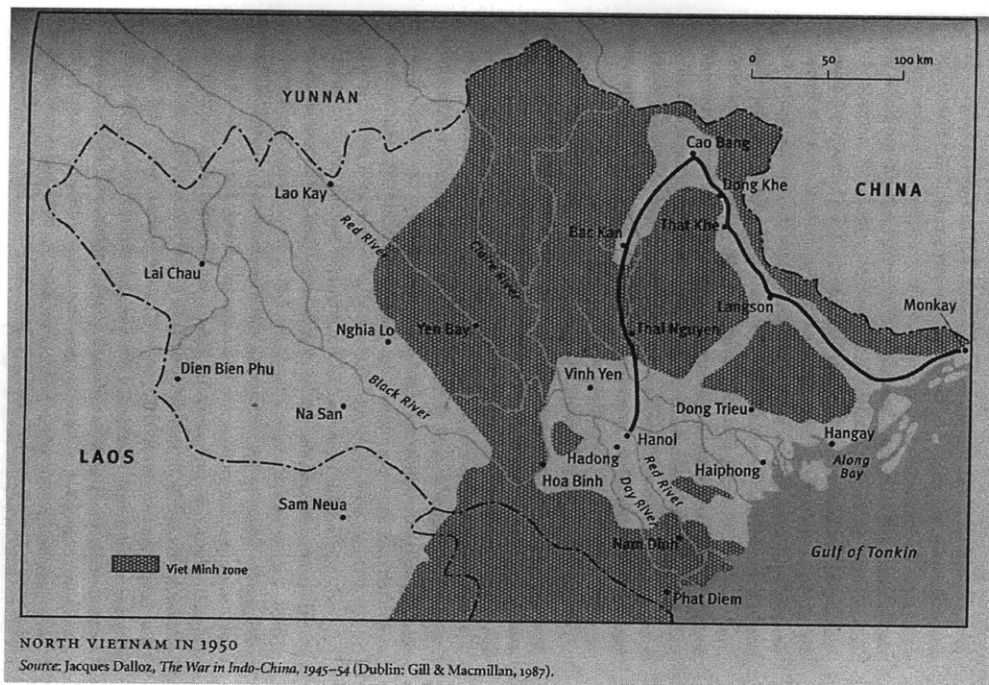
³⁰² Ibid., Goscha, pp. 19

³⁰³ Ibid., Gras, pp. 315.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., Goscha, pp. 16.

³⁰⁵ Chen Jian, "China and the First Indo-China War, 1950-1954," *The China Quarterly*, pp. 85-110; *ibid.*, Goscha, pp. 18; *ibid.*, Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 26.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., Zhai, pp. 29.



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Chen's plan was to attack the French border outposts at Dong Khe and Cao Bang. Vietnamese success against the isolated position at Dong Khe³⁰⁸ set in motion a series of French withdrawals that would soon prove disastrous. When French units were ambushed as they withdrew from Cao Bang, and the Viet Minh forces destroyed both the retreating forces and the columns sent to relieve them. The collapse at Cao Bang was the first clear, French defeat of the war. As panic spread within the French command, the decision was made to abandon the hitherto unthreatened post of Langson.³⁰⁹ A military situation that had appeared stable and even encouraging before the Viet Minh offensive now looked nearly catastrophic.

The surge of Chinese aid and the shock of defeat in the border regions did elicit a strong response from the French. That response, however, was almost entirely conventional and military in nature. The first clear French defeats of the war did not

³⁰⁷ This map is drawn from Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 27.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., Zhai, pp. 29-30.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., Gras, pp. 349-354.

provoke a search for alternatives to the two well worn strategies of the French high command: traditional pacification and conventional strike. Instead, rising American military aid and the growing power of the Chinese trained Viet Minh divisions were to divert French energies away from the problem of population control and towards conventional battle. Though the Expeditionary Corps was to undergo a “resurrection”³¹⁰ under the charismatic leadership of General de Lattre, the response to Cao Bang, and the string of conventional victories in 1951 would reinforce rather than weaken French attachment to the notion of decisive battle.

De Lattre, Escalation and Conventional Response

In the wake of various high level inspections by senior civilians and generals,³¹¹ the government persuaded General de Lattre, one of the three top commanders of the Free French forces in WWII, to assume command of the war in Indochina. De Lattre accepted on the condition that he be appointed High Commissioner as well as senior military commander. This fusion of civil and military authority was to offer one of the few opportunities for genuine strategic unity of command in the Indochina War.

The effect of de Lattre’s arrival was striking. Four hours after arriving in Hanoi, Leclerc addressed a group of French and Vietnamese soldiers, making clear his authority and his belief in the cause of Indochina:

Our struggle here is selfless - it is civilization in its entirety that we defend in Tonkin. We do not fight for domination but for liberation. Never has a war been so noble. I bring you the war but also pride in this war....The era of wavering is past. I guarantee you, military and civilian, French and Vietnamese, that you will be commanded.³¹²

³¹⁰ Ibid., Gras, pp. 367.

³¹¹ Ibid., Turpin, pp. 29.

³¹² General de Lattre as quoted in Gras, pp. 368.

His optimism and determination rallied a French command that had yet to recover from the shock of Cao Bang. He set about sacking officers he considered incapable and replacing them with proven combat leaders. In order to bolster the war effort, he sought to breathe life into the moribund French sponsored government of Bao Dai.

De Lattre's military policy was a comprehensive plan to overcome the problem of inadequate manpower and materiel. On the manpower front, de Lattre pushed for reinforcements, both French and Indochinese. He managed to extract some 15,000 troops from French North Africa under the condition that they would be withdrawn from Indochina no later than July 1952.³¹³ The more important pillar of the manpower expansion was Vietnamese. While previous French Commissioners and military commanders had sponsored the development of a Vietnamese army, de Lattre made rapid expansion of the army the centerpiece of his long term strategy. When de Lattre arrived in 1950, the Vietnamese army consisted of a dozen infantry battalions. By the end of 1952, under severe pressure from de Lattre, the Vietnamese had managed to field one airborne battalion, 40 infantry battalions, three reconnaissance squadrons, two batteries of artillery and six riverine squadrons. This rapid expansion of the Vietnamese regular army understates the significance of Indochinese manpower to the war effort. De Lattre also accelerated the "jaunissement" of French units to cover shortfalls in French personnel, and directed the airborne forces to develop native commandos to foster resistance in Viet Minh controlled areas.³¹⁴

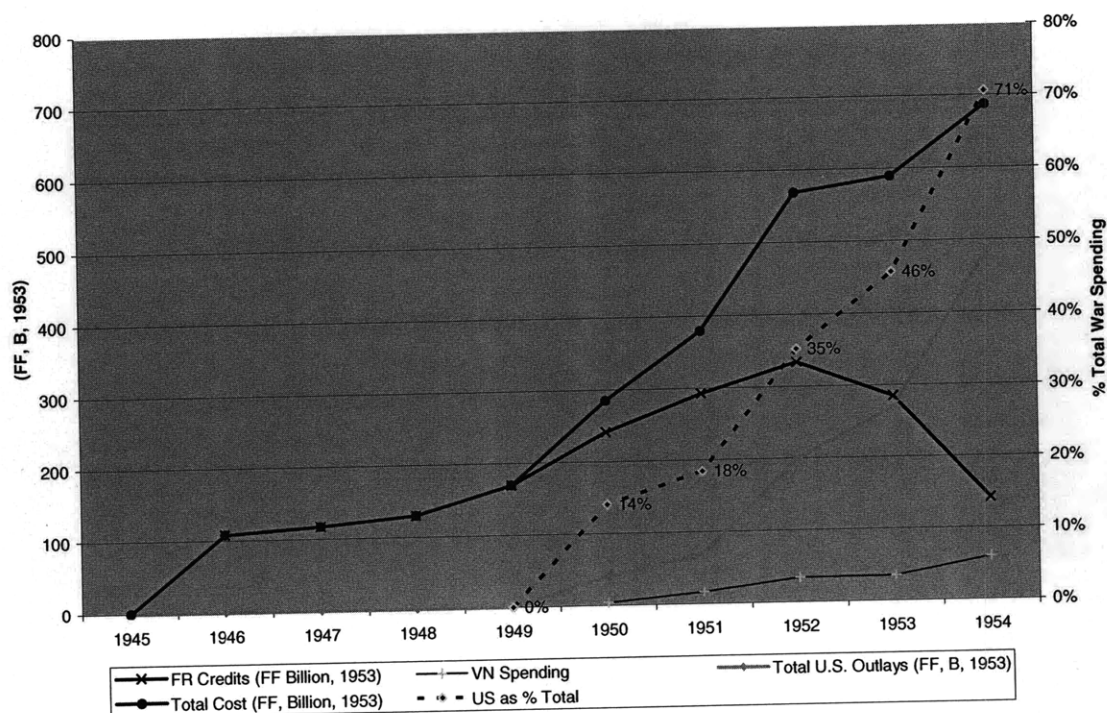
³¹³ Note that the shell game undoubtedly contributed to growing unrest in North Africa (Source: Gras, pp. 398).

³¹⁴ Philippe Pottier, "GCMA/GMI: A French Experience in Counterinsurgency during the French Indochina War," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (June 2005), pp. 125-146; pp. ; Lieutenant-colonel Michel David, *Guerre secrète en Indochine: Les maquis autochtones face au Viet-Minh 1950-1955* (Paris: Lavazuelle, 2005); Colonel Trinquier, *Les Maquis d'Indochine, 1952-1954* (Paris: Éditions Albatros, 1976).

De Lattre's answer to the problem of materiel was Americanization. With the outbreak of the Korean War, de Lattre managed to play on American fears of Communist expansion in Asia to extract vast increases in military aid. American aid came in two varieties: equipment transfers and financial assistance. U.S. transfers of modern military equipment enabled de Lattre to refit a French Expeditionary Corps that had run much of its WWII stock into the ground. Likewise, these transfers in kind furnished the rapidly expanding Vietnamese National Army with the means to achieve operational status. From 1950 through 1953, American aid to the French and to the nominally independent military forces of the Associated States, tripled moving from 40 billion francs to more than 119 billion francs in 1953. The U.S. also provided substantial sums of financial support to the French and the Associated States. Such aid climbed from an initial level of some \$330 million in 1952 to over \$810 million in 1954. Taken together, U.S. military and financial aid had climbed to 71% of the total annual cost of the Indochina War by 1954.³¹⁵

³¹⁵ Ibid., *Tertrais*, Annexe 22, pp. 605.

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With French reinforcements, expanded American military assistance, and a Vietnamese army prepared to shoulder the duty of pacification, de Lattre was confident that he could hold the line in Tonkin and consolidate French gains in the south.

On the level of strategy, de Lattre focused his energies on the defense of the Red River delta against Viet Minh and possibly Chinese Communist assault. Cao Bang and the arrival of the new Chinese trained Viet Minh divisions had forced a shift from conventional attack on Viet Minh stronghold to a conventional defense of the delta.

To bolster French defenses in the delta, he introduced two operational innovations: a line of fortifications and the development of mobile groups. The fortifications, collectively known as the de Lattre line, were essentially a series of 920

³¹⁶ The data for this graph are drawn from Hugues Tertrais, *La piastre et le fusil*, pp. 605.

blockhouses built from 1951 on to form a ring around the delta.³¹⁷ The line served two functions. First, it could blunt Viet Minh main force thrusts into the delta. Second, it could serve as a barrier against the ever present threat of guerilla infiltration of the delta. The mobile groups were essentially an adaptation of the Combat Command structure of American Second World War doctrine to the specific requirements of Indochina.³¹⁸ These motorized units, composed of three infantry battalions, one artillery battalion, and assorted supporting arms, were to become the building blocks of French conventional force in the delta from 1951 to 1954.³¹⁹

Conventional Success and Delayed Search: The Victories of 1951

De Lattre's reforms were put the test in three Viet Minh conventional attacks launched over the first six months of 1951. Giap's forces tried first at Vinh Yen (13-17 January 1951),³²⁰ then at Mao Khe (23 March 51), and finally at the Day River (29 May-18 June 51) to break into the Red River delta and defeat the French Expeditionary corps in the field. These battles, fought close to French bases and on terrain that enabled the French to apply their advantages in firepower, ended in major Viet Minh losses. On a conventional balance sheet, these victories were one sided. While the Viet Minh lost 20,000 men in this six month push to break the French hold on the delta, the French forces sustained a total of roughly 1,500 dead and wounded.³²¹ Not only had the French held the perimeter of the delta, they had broken three concerted pushes by the best

³¹⁷ Ibid., Croizat, pp. 86; Anthony Clayton, *Three Marshals of France: Leadership after Trauma* (London: Brassey's, 1992), pp. 151.

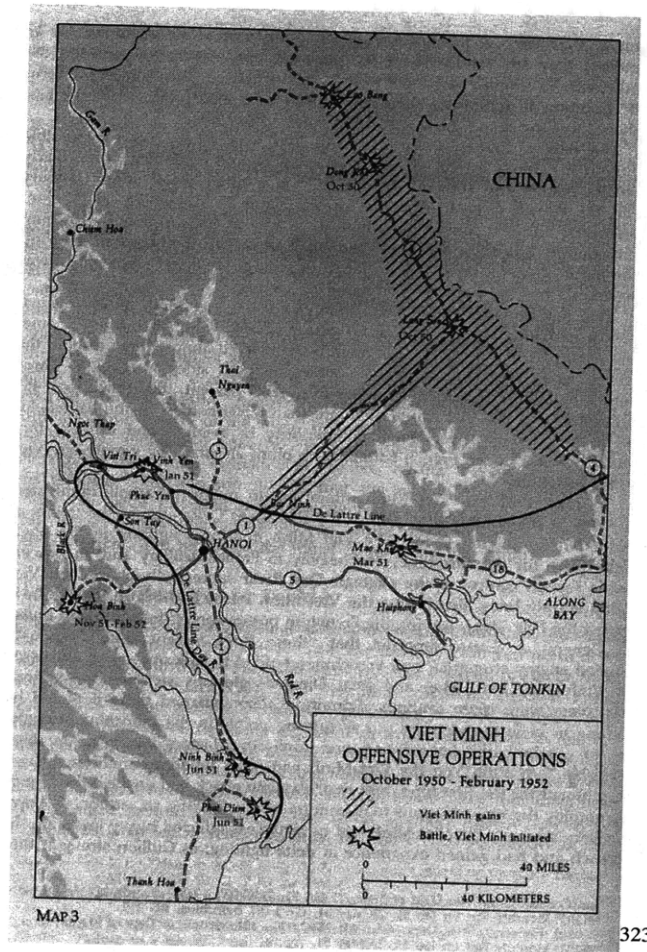
³¹⁸ Ibid., Croizat, pp. 206.

³¹⁹ Ibid., Croizat, pp. 212.

³²⁰ Alexander Zervoudakis, "Vinh Yen," *Revue historique des armées*, No. 194 (mars 1994), pp. 61.

³²¹ Ibid., Pottier, pp. 128.

equipped and trained Viet Minh forces. Beneath the surface, the level of French control in the delta was less encouraging. As part of their assault on Ninh Binh, the Viet Minh had managed to slip six regular battalions into the delta.³²² These forces ultimately forced the French to launch a new series of large unit sweeps to re-pacify the area.



The three victories of 1951 restored French confidence in their own military superiority. The surge in American material assistance from 1951 on enabled the command to refit the Expeditionary Corps that had hitherto depended on increasingly dilapidated WWII equipment. Together, charismatic leadership, conventional victory and massive military assistance encouraged the French state and military to believe that

³²² Ibid., Gras, pp. 409.

³²³ This map is drawn from Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 138.

victory in Indochina was still achievable. De Lattre appeared to have salvaged the collapsing French campaign and shown that even Chinese supported Viet Minh armies could be defeated under the right conditions.

Ironically, de Lattre was, by the end of his tenure, less confident that his successes were indeed significant and cumulative. The three French victories in the delta had proven that the Expeditionary Corps could win conventional battles against numerically superior forces. The Viet Minh had nonetheless proven enormously resilient. In spite of the loss of enormous numbers of trained troops in their six month push, the Viet Minh were able to rebound in time to inflict severe losses on the French later in 1951 and 1952.³²⁴ Furthermore, the Viet Minh had managed to seize and retain the strategic initiative from Cao Bang onward. It was they and not the French who had dictated the place and time of battle in 1951 and de Lattre was unsettled by the essentially reactive state of French strategy. Mixed results on the pacification front, and the growing strength of the Viet Minh regular armies, led de Lattre to voice private doubts about the long term prognosis in Indochina. As he put it in a September 1951 report to the government in Paris, “There may be a catastrophe in Indo-China; there is little chance of a miracle.”³²⁵

These doubts notwithstanding, de Lattre’s final major decision in Indochina was to mount a conventional offensive outside the Red River delta at Hoa Binh. On a purely military level, the capture of Hoa Binh might accomplish two objectives. First, it might cut off the Viet Minh forces in Tonkin from their supporters in Annam and Cochinchina.³²⁶ Second, it might force Giap to fight yet another conventional battle on

³²⁴ Ibid., Gras, pp. 404.

³²⁵ De Lattre as cited in Dalloz, pp. 148.

³²⁶ Ibid., Salan, *Le Việt-minh mon adversaire*, pp. 262.

French terms.³²⁷ De Lattre was also under heavy personal and political pressure to resume the offensive. As his deputy relates, he was stung by French and American accusations of excessive delay and caution:

They understand nothing in Paris! They consider me static and lacking in offensive spirit. They have no idea that I need several more weeks to finish the fortifications and build a Vietnamese Army as large as that of Giap. They want me to attack, that I finish it! To them, I am dragging my feet and this conflict will never end. Very well, I am going to attack....Attack, attack! I am going to Hoa Binh and I will cut the Viet Minh in two....Believe me, it must be done! Up to now, we have never taken the initiative, we have been content to put out the fires the Viet Minh have set. I will throw down the gauntlet and I will see if Giap accepts my challenge.³²⁸

A victory brought on by French offensive action promised to silence criticism and furnish positive proof to the Americans of the soundness of their growing investment in the war. Faced with a growing enemy and mounting criticism of French strategy, de Lattre proposed a classic conventional military operation. The benefits of his plan made sense in a conventional conflict: “cutting the enemy in two,” bringing him to battle on favorable terms, and regaining the initiative all proceeded from the assumption that the contest was being waged on the battlefield. The risks of the Hoa Binh operation fell outside the bounds of that conventional contest. By committing the French mobile reserves to a battle outside the Red River Delta, the command left itself open to increased subversion and backsliding on the pacification front.

In spite of the reservations of many on his staff,³²⁹ de Lattre launched the Hoa Binh operation in November 1951. As in 1947, the initial results of the conventional push were encouraging; the French managed to seize their objective with no real opposition and proceeded to build a fortified salient connecting Hoa Binh to the Red

³²⁷ Ibid., Salan, *Le Viêt-minh mon adversaire*, pp. 263.

³²⁸ De Lattre as quoted in Salan, *Le Viêt-minh mon adversaire*, pp. 262-263.

³²⁹ Ibid., Salan, *Le Viêt-minh mon adversaire*, pp. 262-263.

River delta.³³⁰ De Lattre's gamble upset Giap's plans for offensive action in the upcoming campaign season leading him to commit the bulk of the Viet Minh striking force to an assault on the French positions at Hoa Binh.³³¹ By January, however, Viet Minh pressure on French supply lines had become severe. In order to maintain a force of five infantry battalions at Hoa Binh, the French had to commit a further twelve battalions and three artillery groups to hold the salient connecting Hoa Binh to the Red River delta.³³² While the Viet Minh assaults were as costly as those of the earlier offensives of 1951, they cost the French dearly. The French lost close to a thousand dead between November and February 1952, and the defense of Hoa Binh tied down almost the entire operational reserve of the Expeditionary Corps.³³³

Phase 4: Conventional Defense and Experimentation (1952-1953)

General Salan's sixteen month tenure as G n super saw major innovations and the first real hints of a strategic shift from Model 1 to Model 2. On the conventional front, Salan's approach was more defensive and was focused to an unprecedented extent on pacification. Mounting Viet Minh conventional strength and the curious combination of abundant American materiel and limited manpower, led Salan to experiment a novel way of bringing the enemy to battle of French terms – the fortified camp supplied entirely by air. On the unconventional front, Salan sponsored experiments in psychological operations, resettlement, and counter-guerilla warfare. While these efforts never entirely

³³⁰ Ibid., Fall, pp. 48; *ibid.*, Gras, pp. 430.

³³¹ Ibid., Gras, pp. 430.

³³² Ibid., Fall, pp. 59.

³³³ Ibid., Gras, pp. 451, 454.

superseded the overall emphasis on the conventional dimensions of the war, they were the clear precursors of political war (Model 2) in Algeria.

With de Lattre's death from cancer in December 1951, General Salan, his principal deputy, assumed command of the French forces in Indochina. Salan was in many ways an ideal successor. A longtime veteran of the colonial army in Indochina, Salan was intimately familiar with the culture and politics of the region. His personal familiarity with local leaders, to include Ho Chi Minh and Giap, made him a particularly astute operator on the political level. As the architect of Valluy's 1947 offensives in Tonkin, he was familiar with the potential and the limitations of conventional battle against the Viet Minh. Under his stewardship, the French Expeditionary Corps would continue to chase the perennial goals of decisive battle and pacification. But to a larger measure than in previous periods, Salan encouraged the exploration of unconventional methods and increased emphasis on the role of mass politics in the struggle.

Salan's willingness to sponsor Model 2 reflected both his personal experience with the limits of conventional response against the Viet Minh and his greater sensitivity to the political dynamics of the war in Indochina.

Salan's first major decision was to evacuate Hoa Binh in favor of renewed pacification in the Red River Delta.³³⁴ In late February 1952, Salan managed to extract French forces from the salient and redeploy them in a series of what he hoped would be a final set of pacification sweeps of the delta. French entanglement at Hoa Binh had enabled the Viet Minh to slip two full divisions into the area,³³⁵ and Salan's local commanders mounted a series of large scale sweeps to flush out and destroy these regular

³³⁴ Ibid., Salan, *Le Viêt-minh mon adversaire*, pp. 287; Ibid., Dalloz, pp. 147.

³³⁵ Ibid., Gras, pp. 451; Ibid., Fall, pp. 61.

units. These operations showcased ongoing French refinements of large scale cordon and search operations. Generals de Linares and Cogne conducted a series of operations from February 1952 through late spring, each involving combined arms formations of up to fifteen and twenty battalions. The trick, as in all previous episodes of pacification, was to surround the guerilla units and apply overwhelming French advantages in firepower. Each commander experimented with his own approaches to these problems. In the southern portion of the delta, General de Linares used large units to encircle large areas and press inwards. While he managed to push one of the Viet Minh divisions out of his area of operations, the results fell short of the anticipated battle of annihilation. General Cogne, by contrast, used smaller units to pin point the location of the enemy before encircling him. His operations around Bac Ninh managed to trap a number of large enemy units and inflict heavy losses on them.

As a result of de Linares and Cogne's battles in the spring of 1952, the French had managed to drive the two Viet Minh divisions out of the delta and inflict severe casualties.³³⁶ The elimination of main force units set the stage for the second and third phases of pacification: detailed search of the cleared areas and the restoration of local government administration. The process of combing through each village was extremely time and labor intensive. By Salan's own estimate, the "combing" of cleared areas could be reduced to a depressingly simple formula: one battalion, one village, half a day.³³⁷ Even this process fell short of the necessary goal – the restoration of clear and durable local administration. To accomplish this task, and move beyond the limits of 19th century methods of Gallieni and Lyautey, Salan introduced new civil-military formations called

³³⁶ Ibid., Gras, pp. 458-460

³³⁷ Ibid., Croizat, pp. 85.

GAMOs. These “Mobile Operational and Administrative Groups” were composed of 150 Vietnamese administrators and their security details. Each group was to root out the Viet Minh political apparatus in a cleared area and replace it with a new local government. Though the employment of these groups represented a major step forward in French thinking on pacification, they failed to live up to expectations. While Salan and other commentators insisted that diversion of resources and limited time were the chief obstacles to broader success with the GAMO approach,³³⁸ it is unclear whether the simple substitution of new Vietnamese government personnel would have permanently rolled back Viet Minh domination of the region.

Conventional Threat and Conventional Response: Na San and Operation Lorraine
(1952)

Salan’s focus on pacification was upset in the fall of 1952 by a new round of Viet Minh offensives in the western highlands of Tonkin. Giap unleashed an attack by three Viet Minh divisions on the thinly populated region between the Red River and the Laotian border to the west. The French could not resist the offensive in a region they had long held with a skeletal force and a network of tribal militias. Giap’s attack on the highlands forced Salan to make an unenviable choice: accept battle far from French bases or surrender large portions of western Tonkin and Laos.³³⁹

Salan first move was to establish a center of resistance at Na San. Na San was an innovative twist on earlier French attempts to wage conventional battle with the Viet Minh and one that took advantage of the growing availability of American materiel.

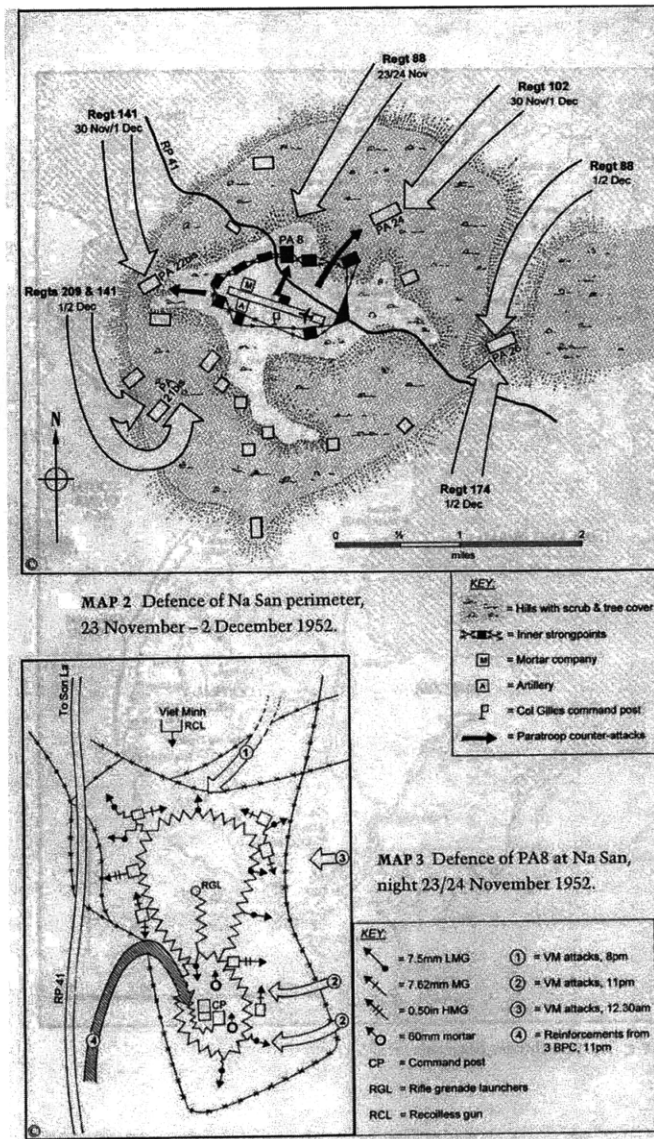
³³⁸ Ibid., Salan, *Le Việt-minh mon adversaire*, pp. 307-8; ibid., Gras, pp. 461.

³³⁹ Ibid., Gras, pp. 473.

Salan decided to build a fortified camp, complete with infantry and artillery units, and built around an airstrip, in order to force Giap into yet another set piece engagement. If Giap refused to attack the base directly, Salan planned to use it as a base for offensive operations against the anticipated Viet Minh into Laos. Within a matter of days, Salan had pushed eight infantry battalions and four artillery batteries into the position and had begun to airlift in bulldozers, tons of barbed wire and the other materials necessary to construct a small fortress.³⁴⁰ The airlift was enormous by contemporary French standards. Between October 16 and the first Viet Minh assaults on November 30, the French managed to push 1,473 cargo sorties into Na San. According to Salan, a C-47 aircraft landed every ten minutes for the full six usable hours of each flying day.³⁴¹ By November 30, the French had managed to build two concentric rings of fortified positions. The outer ring was composed of independent, company sized strong points. Inside this ring, the French built a second ring of field fortifications and wire to protect the mobile reserves, artillery positions and the airfield. The French force of twelve infantry battalions and six artillery batteries prepared to meet an assault by a large portion of the Viet Minh regular army.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., Salan, *Le Việt-minh mon adversaire*, pp. 349.

³⁴¹ Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam* (London: De Capo Press), pp. 59; ibid., Salan, *Le Việt-minh mon adversaire*, pp. 356



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Giap could not resist the opportunity to strike the exposed French position at Na San. Between November 30 and December 2, 1952, the Viet Minh threw 19 battalions against the defenses of Na San. Though the Viet Minh managed to break into the outer defensive works, the French used their artillery, heavy mortars, and mobile reserves to drive them back. This tactical success against a numerically superior and fanatical opponent appeared to validate a new approach to the problem of decisive battle. The flood of American materiel made such a capital intensive answer enormously appealing.

³⁴² These maps are drawn from Martin Window, *The Last Valley*, pp. 10.

In the absence of any air threat, the French might be able to thwart Viet Minh advances by building isolated, fortified camps along the Na San model and supply them entirely by air.

To relieve Viet Minh pressure in the highlands, Salan also launched a large scale attack on the Viet Minh supply depots and lines of supply in northern Tonkin. Salan hoped that this move, Operation Lorraine, would force Giap to divert forces from the offensive to defend his links to his Chinese sponsors. Salan committed some 30,000 troops to this ambitious raid: four mobile groups, three airborne battalions, two infantry battalions, two Dinassauts, and substantial artillery and armored cavalry support. The French push from their bases in the delta towards the ultimate objective at Phu Doan mirrored earlier large scale French conventional raids. The technical execution of the operation was impressive; French units managed to drive some 75 kilometers, overcoming numerous natural obstacles and Viet Minh attacks. Superlative execution did not, however, produce the desired results. Though the Viet Minh did divert one regiment to meet the French thrust, this reaction fell well short of Salan's expectations. French units did capture or destroy large supply depots, but these accomplishments were out of proportion to the effort expended.³⁴³

The shock of the Viet Minh offensives in western Tonkin triggered major changes on the level of operational routines. The David and Goliath outcome at Na San led some in the French to believe that this was a generalizable solution to the French dilemma of limited manpower and abundant materiel. On the other hand, the loss of the highlands

³⁴³ Ibid., Salan, *Le Viêt-minh mon adversaire*, pp. 341; Ibid., Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 159; *ibid.*, Gras, pp. 482.

prompted Salan to devote greater resources to unconventional solutions to the problems of population control.

Model 2 Experiments: Politics as war by other means

Though junior officers had engaged in local experimentation from the early days of the war, it was not until 1952 that three initiatives in unconventional approaches to pacification received major support. All three projects shared certain common features typical. All saw the control of the population as the true object of the struggle, and all emphasized the importance of psychological and political means in securing that object. Inspired by Viet Minh successes in French junior officers sought to develop innovative approaches of their own to the problem of population control. All three approaches were based on a view of the local population as centrally important but effectively malleable. While the impact of the experiments on the course of the war would be relatively modest, the interpretation and misinterpretation of their results was to fuel the development of the Model 2 approach to counterinsurgency in the subsequent Algerian War.

The Maquis

In the wake of the 1952 offensives, Salan supported a major expansion in a French support for anti-Viet Minh guerilla groups or *maquis* in Tonkin. While these guerilla forces, formally known as the GCMA (*Groupeement de Commandos Mixtes Aéroportés*) and later the GMI (*Groupeement Mixte d'Intervention*), were formally established under de Lattre,³⁴⁴ the collapse of French control in western Tonkin made them an increasingly attractive alternative to direct French control of large swathes of

³⁴⁴ Ibid., David, *Guerre secrète*, pp. 65-73; *ibid.*, Pottier, pp. 128.

highland territory.³⁴⁵ The *maquis* concept began as a straightforward application of partisan warfare to weaken a numerically superior Viet Minh opponent.³⁴⁶ Over time, however, many of the leading proponents of the GCMA, among them their last operational commander, Colonel Roger Trinquier, came to see the groups as an effective and generalizable way to apply and improve upon Viet Minh methods of population control.

Highland resistance against the Viet Minh had been present from the beginning of the Viet Minh rebellion. Many of the tribal groups were resentful and suspicious of the Viet Minh's aggressive push into the highland areas. Their traditional dislike of lowland intrusion made them eager to accept take up arms against the Viet Minh. French support began with the transfer of arms to existing tribal groups, but soon expanded into more active efforts to recruit, train, indoctrinate and lead native *maquis*.

The French approach was based on the use of small numbers of French and native cadre to foster and support hill tribe resistance groups. A small team or "antenna" of four French and native officers and NCOs, equipped with radios, would be introduced into an area to make contact with hill tribes and organize resistance. In theory, groups of 1,000 native guerillas and 3,000-5,000 native supporters would enable the *maquis* to control a large swathe of territory and hold off all but the most determined Viet Minh efforts to

³⁴⁵ Resistance to American encroachment may also have played an important role in de Lattre's endorsement of the GCMA concept. CIA offers to run similar groups in Tonkin led the French to develop their own (Source: David, pp. 65).

³⁴⁶ General Carpentier, the G  n  super during the Cao Bang disaster, proposed the development of resistance groups in Tonkin to help stabilize his position in the aftermath of the collapse of frontier outposts along RC 4. Carpentier had a relatively limited and strictly military interpretation of their utility; he hoped that these groups could disrupt the Viet Minh lines of supply and communication by mounting small scale guerilla attacks (Source: David, *Guerre Secr  te*, pp. 46-47).

root them out.³⁴⁷ By 1953, the French had managed to build a force of over 14,000 guerillas.³⁴⁸

What had begun as a conventional use of partisans to disrupt Viet Minh operations in Tonkin soon grew into a more ambitious program to cultivate resistance and establish French control over the native populations. The French used a three step approach consciously modeled on the Viet Minh methods of political struggle or *dau tranh*.³⁴⁹ French teams first identified local grievances, the raw material from which anti-Viet Minh resistance might be built. The cadre next tried to stimulate increasing levels of resistance behavior. By convincing the locals to assist first in reconnaissance and later in military action against the Viet Minh, the French hoped to bind native populations ever closer to their cause. Once the native populations were inextricably linked to the French cause, the French could build an organization capable of controlling the population.³⁵⁰

While the GCMA/GMI concept was an explicit attempt to blend political and military action, the motivating political vision had a foot firmly in the military operational code. Though they emphasized the importance of identifying local grievances, French organizers tended to treat the population as essentially passive and malleable. From the French point of view, the population might be the ultimate prize in revolutionary warfare, but it was not an independent actor. French observers tended to attribute Viet Minh or French success in population control to the actions of external

³⁴⁷ Roger Trinquier, *Les Maquis d'Indochine* (Paris: Société de Production Littéraire, 1976), pp. 95.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., Pottier, pp. 125.

³⁴⁹ For an extensive discussion of Vietnamese theories of the relationship between political mobilization and armed struggle, see Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1986), pp. 17-35.

³⁵⁰ The three step conversion process is drawn from a January 1952 memorandum written by Roger Trinquier (Source: David, *Guerre Secrète*, pp. 118-119).

organizers rather than the endogenous preferences of the local population. The *maquis* concept was the embodiment of the Model 2 version of politics: a struggle to control a largely inert population through the use of positive and negative incentives.

While the contribution to the war effort was relatively modest,³⁵¹ the impact of the GCMA/GMI experiments on French concepts of counterinsurgency was more profound. The architects of the *maquis* held them up as examples of effective mass mobilization and counter-subversion in revolutionary war. Just as the Viet Minh had succeeded in organizing large swathes of the Vietnamese population to support their cause and resist French pacification, the pioneers of the *maquis* program appeared to have sponsored and shaped a resistance movement on a substantial scale. While the scale of French supported resistance in western Tonkin was impressive, the question was how much of this was the product of French conversion as opposed to existing anti-Viet Minh sentiment. Even within Indochina, it is telling that successful *maquis* almost always relied on ethnic or religious minority groups. Since the ethnic minorities constituted no more than 10% of the Vietnamese population,³⁵² and were concentrated in the western and northern highlands of Tonkin, it is hard to see how even a fully developed *maquis* program could have helped overcome the pacification problem in the Red River delta.

³⁵¹ The net contributions of the *maquis* are open to debate. Proponents have emphasized the role of the *maquis* in diverting Viet Minh troops and enabling the difficult withdrawal from Na San in 1953. Skeptics have noted that these efforts did little to slow the progress of the Viet Minh and could never have expanded beyond the confines of the hill tribe population. For a sample of this debate, see the conference reactions to Michel David's presentation on the *maquis* in Vaïsse, *L'Armée française dans la guerre d'Indochine*, pp. 167-169.

³⁵² Though estimates of the population of the highlands were notoriously unreliable, a recent estimate based on a 1947 study by French military intelligence put the total minority population in Tonkin at 915,000. Using an estimated Tonkinese population in 1947 of 8.7 million, this makes the ethnic minorities equal to 10% of the northern population (Source: Michel David, *Guerre Secrète*, pp. 28.).

Population Resettlement in Cambodia

Between 1945 and 1952, the French command had developed few viable alternatives to their three stage approach to pacification. Offensive operations, followed by thorough search and detention, were supposed to make the reintroduction of French or Associated States' control, in the form of administrators and fortified strongpoints, both feasible and lasting. In practice, French played the role of Sisyphus in the pacification struggle. No sooner had they cleared an area at great expense, than the Viet Minh local cadre and guerillas, often with the help of infiltrated regular units, began to undermine the local government and reassert Communist control. An area that had been cleared in one year often had to be pacified yet again in the following season.

The French pacification campaign in Cambodia in 1952 marked an important departure from this core French model.³⁵³ Viet Minh subversion in western Cambodia in 1951 had undermined French and Cambodian control over a large portion of the rural population. The French had applied the standard responses of outpost construction and local militia development between 1950 and 1951 to no avail. In 1952, the local command decided instead to resettle large portions of the Cambodian population in fortified villages. Resettlement offered an entirely new way to protect the population and separate them from the insurgents.

The results of the Cambodian campaign were encouraging. By resettling some 500,000 Cambodian peasants in 1952,³⁵⁴ the French managed to roll back the Viet Minh advances and provide an unprecedented level of security to the local population. The

³⁵³ The most complete account of the Cambodian resettlement program was written by Capitaine André Souyris, "Un procédé efficace de contre-guerilla: l'auto-défense des populations," *Revue Défense Nationale* (juin 1956).

³⁵⁴ Souyris puts the total number closer to one million or roughly two thirds of the rural Cambodian population (ibid., Souyris, pp. 686).

concentration of the population made military protection and local self-defense more effective. In theory, resettlement also gave the government the opportunity to pursue positive social development. Through programs of education, economic assistance and the like, the government planned to drive economic progress and cement popular support.

The Cambodian campaign appeared to offer an alternative to serial pacification. As in the case of the maquis in Tonkin, however, the French tended to attribute success to the validity of their new models. Ignoring many of the particular circumstances that made local populations accept French protection in these areas, they tended to assume that the models were exportable. In truth, Cambodia was different in ways that favored resettlement. Lower population density in eastern Cambodia made resettlement less disruptive in economic and social terms; resettled populations could be guaranteed equivalent land for cultivation in the new villages. Cambodian culture, with its more flexible and less hierarchical structure, was less resistant to these changes than the more rigid Vietnamese one. Most important, the Viet Minh were foreigners in Cambodia. Though ethnic Vietnamese had long played an important role in social and economic life in Cambodia, they were socially and ethnically foreign.³⁵⁵ The Cambodian experiment was yet another example of the French tendency to overstate the generalizability of pacification solutions. Instead of focusing on the unique set of circumstances that had made the Cambodian population receptive to resettlement, the French came to believe that the experiment demonstrated the potential of Viet Minh style population control.

³⁵⁵ These observations on high Cambodian receptivity to resettlement are drawn from George Armstrong Kelly, *Lost Soldiers* (pp. 101).

Psychological Action: From public affairs to psychological warfare

Though the French military had engaged in small scale psychological operations in Indochina from 1945 on, the scale, focus and form of these operations changed significantly starting in 1952. Whereas early French operations had been focused on bolstering French morale and countering Viet Minh claims, and had relied on relatively blunt, mass appeals, the psychological warfare projects of the late war were conscious attempts to replicate Viet Minh successes in population control. Growing recognition of the sophistication and apparent efficacy of Viet Minh methods led middle level French officers to explore similar approaches to pacification. In spite of the increased interest in and refined focus of French psychological operations from 1952 on, their impact on the course of the Indochina war was quite limited. The primary significance of these initiatives lay in their influence on French thinking in the Algerian war. The appeal of a new tool to control restive populations was immense, and the early practitioners of psychological action in Indochina were to be the prophets of much broader and more ambitious efforts in Algeria.

Early French efforts were largely confined to loosely targeted, mass appeals. From 1945 through 1951, the French did use fliers and media addresses to communicate basic appeals to several audiences: the Vietnamese population, the French Union forces, and the French home front. Though poorly coordinated and thinly resourced, these appeals were intended to bolster confidence in the French and later Associated States' authorities and counter the appeal of the Viet Minh. This concept of psychological operations reached its zenith under de Lattre. In his appeals to a range of audiences - Indochinese, American and French - de Lattre sought to use ideological appeals and

public recognition of battlefield victories to increase moral and material support for the war effort. Though de Lattre was keenly aware of the potential importance of media relations, his vision of the psychological dimensions remained at the level of strategic communications and public affairs. True to his upbringing as a conventional soldier, de Lattre could grasp the importance of morale and the role of publicity in amplifying battlefield successes; he did not embrace a vision of warfare in which the targeted control of local populations was a principal object of struggle.

Problems with bureaucratic coordination and performance measurement further inhibited the development of effective psychological warfare. Before 1952, French initiatives in psychological operations had been split among a number of different civilian, military and intelligence bureaus. This division led to numerous clashes over authority and over the messages.³⁵⁶ Only the clear unification of psychological warfare under the Propaganda Service and the *Génésuper* in 1952 brought some semblance of unity to the psychological operations community.³⁵⁷ Performance measurement was a more difficult problem. Though many were willing to grant the possibility of effective psychological manipulation, even the most ardent supporters had difficulty supporting their claims of effectiveness.³⁵⁸ Even where the French were clearly successful in pacification, the specific causal role played by psychological action remained unclear. In the absence of clear measures of effectiveness, the advocates of psychological warfare

³⁵⁶ Paul et Marie-Catherine Villatoux, *La République et son armée face au "péril surversif": Guerre et action psychologiques (1945-1960)* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2005), pp. 254

³⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 258.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 253-254.

had to fall back on some mix of expert opinion, prisoner testimony and captured enemy communications.³⁵⁹

While certain French leaders recognized the utility of a more precise, targeted approach to psychological action, it was not until 1950 that the French began to appreciate the scale and intensity of Viet Minh political warfare.³⁶⁰ The Viet Minh had developed a sophisticated and methodical approach to population control. Subversion typically began with a comprehensive and clandestine survey of local grievances. Once they had developed a detailed understanding of the leading issues in the community, the Viet Minh cadre would seek to channel these grievances into increased support for local resistance. At the same time, the cadre set about organizing the population into various groupings by profession, age and function. These organizations gave the Viet Minh a powerful means of controlling and monitoring community members and subverting traditional authorities.³⁶¹ With the groundwork for control in place, the Viet Minh could extract material resources and manpower from the community.

Heightened awareness of Viet Minh methods, and their failure to consolidate pacification gains in the Red River and Mekong deltas, led a growing number of French officers to model their approaches to population control on those of the enemy. French initiatives in the highlands, in Cambodian resettlement programs, and in the sect controlled regions of Cochinchina appeared to yield impressive results and validate a Viet Minh style campaign to control the local population.

That these initiatives never became the main French effort is doubly significant. The local successes in areas where native populations were hostile towards the Viet Minh

³⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 254.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 218.

³⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 270.

led the French to overstate the generalizability of their new methods. Second, the relatively late and uneven introduction of these techniques suggested that greater resources and greater refinement of such techniques might hold the key to controlling subject populations in future cases of revolutionary war. Only in Algeria would the French be able to test these classic Model 2 approaches to population control.

American Critiques of French Performance in Indochina

With their growing sponsorship of the war, Americans began to develop strong views on French counter-insurgent performance. These views are important to this study for two reasons. First, the American military's evaluation of French performance is a natural experiment in the influence of the military operational code. If, as supporters of cultural explanations often argue, historical experience and national tradition determine organizational responses to counterinsurgency, then we should expect to see significant variation in the responses of officers of different military traditions. If, on the other hand, the shared professional lens is the primary source of learning dysfunction, then we should expect to see similar interpretations from officers regardless of country of origin. These outside opinions also control for the influence of bureaucratic drivers of military response. While the French military, especially the General Staff in Paris, had to weigh changes in Indochina against the needs of NATO rearmament, American military officers were free of such bureaucratic pressures.

American views on French performance also played an increasingly direct role in French strategy as the war progressed. As American contributions increased, military leaders sought to influence the conduct of the war and even the selection of senior French

military leaders. American military advisors were to play a significant role in shaping the last major French war plan in Indochina – the so-called Navarre Plan of 1953-1954.

From the start of major military assistance in 1950 through the end of the war in 1954, the basic American critique of French strategy was remarkably stable. To most American officers, military stalemate was an overly defensive approach to counterinsurgency. By committing the majority of their troops to static, defensive missions, the French had failed to mount large and aggressive operations against their numerically and qualitatively inferior Viet Minh opponents. General Erskine, the Marine general in charge of the first military advisory mission to Indochina, argued that “ the French appeared to have ‘lost most of their offensive spirit.’”³⁶² After the French defeat at Cao Bang, General Douglas MacArthur echoed this frustration with the apparent French failure to act:

The French have 150,000 of their best troops there with an officer of the highest reputation in command [General Carpentier]....I cannot understand why they do not clean it up. They should be able to do so in four months yet we have recently seen a debacle....They have the flower of the French army in Indochina and they are not fighting.³⁶³

To most American officers, it was clear that the French inability to crush an apparently weak guerilla opponent could only be the product of inaction or incompetence.

On the political front, Americans argued that the French needed to grant true independence to the Vietnamese in order to transform the conflict from a colonial war of liberation into an anti-communist crusade. The Americans, drawing on their recent experience in Korea and the Philippines, believed that such a move would enable the French to raise a Vietnamese national army equal in quality and quantity to that of the Viet Minh.

³⁶² Ibid., Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 114.

³⁶³ Ibid., Spector, pp. 126.

Mounting American frustration with French political and military performance led then President Eisenhower to apply pressure for a change in command and in strategy. In a May 1953 letter to the U.S. Ambassador to France, Eisenhower called on the French Prime Minister to replace General Salan with “a ‘forceful and inspirational leader’ in the tradition of de Lattre. Eisenhower recommended either Lt. Gen. Jean E. Valluy, who had long experience in Indochina and was the officer responsible for the bloody bombardment of Haiphong in 1946, or General Augustine Guillaume, who had commanded French occupation troops in Germany and was then inspector of French forces in North Africa.”³⁶⁴ Eisenhower’s unusual request betrayed a firm belief in basic American critique. French forces evidently suffered from a lack of energetic leadership and a de Lattre type figure could restore the situation, presumably through aggressive efforts to engage the enemy main body. While the French had already chosen to replace Salan with General Navarre, American pressure and advice reflected a firm belief in the conventional origins of stalemate and the potential for a second conventional resurrection.

Phase 5: Navarre and the Return to Conventional Battle (1953-1954)

The appointment of General Navarre as overall commander marked the last major turning point in French strategy in Indochina and a clear return to conventional response (Model 1). This return reflected at least three major influences: the increasing flow of American materiel, mounting U.S. pressure for offensive action against the Viet Minh main body, and the reliably conventional appreciation of the problem by a new commander and his inexperienced staff. Though Navarre did not stamp out the

³⁶⁴ Ibid., Spector, pp. 172-173.

unconventional developments sponsored by Salan, and even provided support to certain specific initiatives, his tenure was to be dominated by a return to a modified and expanded version of Valluy's conventional plans of 1947. Like Valluy, Navarre sought to pacify significant regions of the country to set the stage for a decisive battle with the Viet Minh forces in Tonkin.

Navarre's appointment was a demonstration of profound French and American dissatisfaction with his predecessor Salan. Local successes such as Na San notwithstanding, French control in Indochina had declined substantially in the year following de Lattre's exit. The Viet Minh had seized control of the western highlands and had overcome repeated efforts to consolidate control in the Red River Delta. French political leaders wanted a rapid and decisive conclusion to a conflict that continued to sap French political will and military resources. American military leaders were convinced that Salan had been excessively cautious, and this had cost the French the initiative.³⁶⁵ Both groups believed that a return to the offensive held the best chance of success.

Navarre, who lacked any previous experience in Indochina, opened his tenure with a comprehensive survey of conditions. In the absence of any detailed political guidance, he set as his goal a complete military victory or a severe weakening of the enemy to make possible negotiation on French terms.³⁶⁶ While on paper he commanded the largest military force in the history of the conflict, he swiftly recognized that widespread popular support for the Viet Minh effectively negated his slim numerical advantage. With fully 90% of French forces tied down in defensive missions, the French

³⁶⁵ Major General Thomas J.H. Trapnall, "Remarks made by Major General Thomas J.H. Trapnall, Jr., former Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Indochina, 3 May 1954," in *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of Decisionmaking on Vietnam: The Senator Gravel Edition, Vol. 1* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), Document 41, pp. 495.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Gras, pp. 512.

had a mere 23,000 troops in the general reserve to confront a Viet Minh regular force of nearly 125,000.³⁶⁷

Having concluded that the French forces lacked the means to achieve a victory in the very near term, Navarre produced a plan deeply reminiscent of Valluy's of 1947. Drawing on the advice of his largely inexperienced staff³⁶⁸ and American advisers, Navarre produced a Model 1 strategy. In the 1953-54 campaign season, the French would avoid decisive battle and focus instead on developing the capacity of the Vietnamese national army. In 1954-55, the French would launch a pacification campaign in the south. Only once the south was firmly in hand, and pacification and area control missions were turned over to the expanded Vietnamese national army, would the French Expeditionary Corps turn its energies to Tonkin. Freed from its pacification duties and assembled en masse, the Expeditionary Corps would seek out and defeat the Viet Minh main body in northern Tonkin in 1955.³⁶⁹

The Navarre Plan, as it was called, received a mixed reaction in the American camp. General O'Daniel, the new chief of the American military mission in Indochina, had pressured Navarre to return to the offense at the earliest opportunity. In his subsequent reporting to Washington, O'Daniel, who had played an important personal role in shaping the final document, praised Navarre for his "aggressiveness" and his willingness to part with the defensive posture of Salan.³⁷⁰ Those American observers who expressed reservations about the "Navarre concept" generally cited the lingering

³⁶⁷ This figure excludes the Vietminh regional forces (75,000) and the local Popular Front forces (125,000) (Source: Gras, pp. 514-515).

³⁶⁸ Salan's departure in 1953 was followed by an exodus of senior staff officers with experience in Indochina. As a result, Navarre began his tour, as his political superiors and American advisers had hoped, with a perspective entirely unfettered by practical experience in the theater.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., Gras, pp. 512-513.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 175.

influence of defensive thinking. The JCS objected to the precedence given to early pacification in the south and inadequate concentration of the Expeditionary Corps into large striking units.³⁷¹ The JCS insisted that the French undertake local offensive operations from 1953 on and accelerate the development of division scale Vietnamese army units.³⁷² As if to underline their insistence on a return to open battle and the conditionality of U.S. military assistance, the text of the Franco-American aid communiqué of 1953 clearly stated that “the French government had decided to attack and to destroy the regular forces of the enemy in Indochina.”³⁷³

Navarre’s plan did not survive contact with the Vietminh. His campaign to pacify the south soon foundered as the French again failed to translate conventional military advantages into complete or lasting control.³⁷⁴ Operation Camargue, launched in July 1953, was the third French attempt in two years to crush a single Viet Minh regiment along the Colonial Route 1 between Hue and Quang Tri, the so-called “Street without Joy.”³⁷⁵ The operation, which pitted 30 French battalions against this single regiment, revealed the profound limitations of even the best orchestrated offensive pacification encirclements. The French infantry, armor, and airborne units, lavishly supported with naval gunfire and close air support, proved unable to overcome the limitations imposed by terrain and a hostile population. Instead of destroying Regiment 95 and re-establishing permanent French control in that region of Annam, the French produced the usual mixed results: 182 enemy dead, 387 captured at the cost of 17 French dead and 100

³⁷¹ Laurent Cesari, “Les tentatives américaines pour implanter le ‘modèle coréen’ en Indochine” in Vaisse, *L’Armée française dans la guerre d’Indochine*, pp. 95.

³⁷² Ibid., Cesari, pp. 95-96; ibid., Trapnall, pp. 492, 494-495.

³⁷³ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume XIII (Indochina), Part 1, pp. 810-812.

³⁷⁴ For a more complete account of Operation Atlante, the pacification campaign in the south, see Michel Grintchenko, “*Atlante-Aréthuse: une opération de pacification en Indochine* (Paris: Economica, 2001).

³⁷⁵ Ibid., Gras, pp. 517; ibid., Fall, pp. 144.

wounded.³⁷⁶ French attempts to replace Viet Minh local leadership were even less encouraging. The bulk of the regiment had managed to elude the best French efforts to seal off their escape. As Bernard Fall noted in his account of the operation, the replacement administrators faced an almost impossible dilemma. If they asserted their authority, they risked elimination by local supporters or the remnants of the unvanquished Viet Minh forces. If they relied on local French troops for protection, they lost all authority in the eyes of the locals. As one officer noted, these problems meant they would undoubtedly need to return again in “three months” to re-pacify the area.³⁷⁷

The French fared little better in Tonkin. Though Navarre garnered positive attention for a successful airborne and armored raid on Langson in late July 1953, Viet Minh preparations in western Tonkin soon revealed the degree to which they and not the French held the strategic initiative. In order to block Viet Minh offensive action against Laos, Navarre approved the creation of a new fortified camp, a “super-Na San” at Dien Bien Phu. This move, brought on by the threat of Viet Minh pressure on Laos, would soon absorb over 12 French battalions and the majority of French air support and air transport in Indochina. The attempt to repeat Salan’s feat at Na San soon proved to be disastrous. Not only had the French chosen a location much farther from the airfields of Hanoi and one surrounded by dominating terrain, the Viet Minh had obtained the heavy artillery and anti-aircraft artillery that they had lacked at Na San. These differences doomed the French to a one-sided siege in which the Viet Minh were to bring both overwhelming numerical superiority and abundant firepower to bear on the isolated garrison. Though the war would drag on until August 11, 1954, the fall of Dien Bien Phu

³⁷⁶ Ibid., Fall, pp. 171.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., Fall, pp. 170.

on May 11, 1954, and with it the loss of the bulk of the general reserve effectively sealed the French fate in Indochina.³⁷⁸

Indochina and the Theory

The French case validates many of the theory's most important predictions. With the exception of Leclerc's early Model 3 strategy, French behavior closely matched the dominant intrawar pattern: Model 1 response, followed by Model 1 exploitation, and ending in Model 2 experimentation. French strategic choice had clear roots in the military operational code. The record of d'Argenlieu, Valluy, and de Lattre's diagnoses and prescriptions leave little doubt that all succumbed to the illusion of familiarity. Like most French (and American) military officers in Indochina, they believed that the end of the rebellion would come through decisive, offensive operations against the Vietminh army. The Model 1 learning trap, too, was omnipresent. Small victories, combined with the assumption that gains were cumulative and permanent, led French military leaders to assume that exploitation could translate tactical success into campaign victory. In the last two phases of the war, Model 2 experiments revealed the Model 2 learning trap. Unable to measure local opinion, the French focused on their own measures of performance and were repeatedly surprised by the relapses that occurred whenever military forces were removed.

Task performance, civilian participation, and resources all played significant roles in the evolution of French strategy. Stalemate and even trend failure failed to provoke strategic search between 1946 and 1950. When episodic failure at Cao Band in 1950 opened the door for search, the incoming commander opted for Model 1 exploitation

³⁷⁸ Ibid., Gras, pp. 578.

rather than exploration. Episodic failure was sufficient to provoke search but the operational code and rising resources played the leading roles in the result.

High civilian participation helped Leclerc overcome the illusion of familiarity and resist the temptations of Model 1. Reports and advice from civilian emissaries played an important role in shaping Leclerc's decision to forgo direct confrontation in favor of mixed negotiation and fighting. The rapid decline in civilian participation in late 1946 and 1947 reinforced the Model 1 equilibrium. Perennial weakness in the French metropolitan governments of this period meant that counterinsurgency strategy and policy were determined locally. This set up an unequal contest between the French military command and the modest civilian presence.

Resources played several important roles. Resource scarcity in 1945 imposed binding constraints on military choice and played a major role in Leclerc's choice of Model 3. The removal of those constraints led to strategic regression; once the military had the tools to pursue Model 1, they gladly traded Model 3 condominium for set piece battle. The bureaucratic influence of civilians was a function of the resources provided. The military was the beneficiary of most of these flows, and this amplified their influence over strategy. What the French military received also mattered. American military aid came in the form of military capital equipment. Not surprisingly, these factor endowments influenced the strategies chosen. Flows of conventional materiel reinforced the French military's attachment to Model 1.

Chapter 4

The Interwar Pause: French Military Change from Indochina to Algeria (May-November 1954)

Armies emerging from counterinsurgency campaigns face two primary challenges. First, they must interpret their own performance and explain their own successes or failures. Second, they must decide how to respond as an organization. Should the military continue the development of counterinsurgency strategy and routines, or shift resources and attention elsewhere? If militaries were unbiased problem solvers, then the two tasks, the first intellectual and the second bureaucratic, would be logically connected. Given some reasonable expectation of future counterinsurgency problems, the military would seek at the very least to retain and perhaps build upon the insights gleaned from recent experience. The theory presented in Chapter 2 offers an alternative prediction – that military organizations will respond to the removal of task pressure by discarding strategies and routines that are specific to counterinsurgency and shift their emphasis to the preferred mission set of conventional war. This purge is motivated by two forces: the retrospective misinterpretation of wartime experience and the conscious effort to move away from a set of counterinsurgency strategies that undermines the organization's core bureaucratic interests in autonomy, resources and prestige.

The French military's behavior in the interwar period is consistent with the theory and inconsistent with the image of the organization as a simple and unbiased problem solver. The end of the war did prompt an extensive formal and informal debate over the causes of defeat and their implications for future war. The struggle to explain failure in Indochina exposed major divisions between those who saw primarily conventional

military causes and those who emphasized the strategic flaws of the French response to counterinsurgency. The bureaucratic reaction to defeat in Indochina was far less equivocal. In spite of clear indications of nascent rebellion in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, the French army took the end of the war in Indochina as an opportunity to return to the task of conventional modernization and European defense. The lively intellectual debate over the lessons of Indochina did not lead to major investments in doctrine, procurement or organization commensurate with a continuing interest in revolutionary war.

This particular interwar period is distinctive in at least two respects that bear on the theoretical predictions of the study. First, it was remarkably brief. Whether one takes the narrowest definition, from the conclusion of the Geneva conference on July 20, 1954 to the first shots of the rebellion in Algeria on November 1, 1954, or a broader period from fall of Dien Bien Phu on May 7, 1954 to the start of major pacification operations in the last week of 1954, the French army had very little time to explain defeat and react as an institution. The short break between the nine year war in Indochina and the eight year one in Algeria provides an important test of the theories interwar retention. The three enemies of organizational memory are time, turnover and indifference. By all three measures, the transition from Indochina to Algeria should have been an easy test. The organization had almost no time to “forget” about Indochina and it stands to reason that the lessons of Indochina should have survived a six month intermission largely unchanged. Indeed, the French general staff did not complete its three volume, official lessons learned study on Indochina until May 31, 1955. Personnel turnover does not seem to be the culprit either. Many of the veterans of Indochina were sent from there to

Algeria in the months before the outbreak of the rebellion. With Algeria and the presence of this large number of long-service, Indochina professionals should have made the transmission of wartime insights relatively easy. And the officer corps that left Indochina was highly motivated to redress the embarrassment of defeat at the hands of the Viet Minh.

Equally significant was the general warnings of serious unrest across North Africa. As the French army weighed its bureaucratic response to the end of the war in Indochina, it was already deeply engaged in uprisings in Tunisia and Morocco. Within Algeria proper, increases in attacks on French forces and settlers, combined with a steady stream of intelligence reports on the growth of clandestine opposition groups, left little doubt that the army might be called upon to conduct yet another counterinsurgency campaign in the very near term.

Given the brevity of the interwar period and the reasonable expectation of rebellion in North Africa, the French army's turn from counterinsurgency to conventional rearmament in Europe demonstrates the powerful roles played by professional beliefs and bureaucratic interests in shaping institutional response. While an intellectual debate over Indochina raged in formal and informal forums, the French not only shifted its weight of effort from the threats to its overseas possessions to Europe, but did very little to apply relevant lessons to counterinsurgency in Indochina to the incipient rebellions in North Africa. Though less than a year separated the fall of Dien Bien Phu from the outbreak of rebellion in Algeria, and the organization went through an intellectual soul searching over that defeat, the French army of 1954 appeared to revert to pre-Indochina models of organization in its early response to colonial policing and counterinsurgency in Algeria.

Explaining Defeat: Model 1 vs. Model 2

Between the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the clear emergence of the Algerian rebellion in 1955, the French military establishment made a deliberate attempt to evaluate its performance in Indochina and extract meaningful lessons for future revolutionary wars. The ensuing debate over the origins of defeat revealed major divisions of opinion within the officer corps. Senior officers and those who had not served in Indochina generally favored a Model 1 interpretation, while younger officers and Indochina veterans were more likely to espouse a Model 2 explanation of French failure. The overdetermination of the defeat in Indochina and the brevity of the interwar pause left these debates largely unresolved on the eve of the Algerian revolt.³⁷⁹

Contemporary critics of the French war in Indochina agreed on a number of points. Most pointed to a combination of flawed political policy and inadequate national support for the war effort. They were split, however, both on the role of French military strategy in explaining the defeat. For the adherents of Model 1, Indochina was a simple case of conventional defeat. The solution to conventional defeat appeared equally straightforward: greater political purpose, greater resolve, more resources, and a more refined conventional strategy could deliver victory in colonial war. For the younger officers who had been involved in the failed pacification campaigns and the late war experiments with population control, the conventional strategy was itself the problem. Only by identifying the population as the center of gravity, and by developing

³⁷⁹ Peter Paret has noted the inherent ambiguity of the Indochina experience and the formidable gap between explanation and prescription: "The defeat did rouse the army, or, more correctly, groups within it, to the recognition that against a politically sophisticated enemy fighting on his native ground, conventional methods of colonial repression were insufficient.What the defeat did not indicate was exactly how future conflicts should be fought." (Source: Peter Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria: The Analysis of a Political and Military Doctrine* (Dunmow: Pall Mall Press, 1962), pp. 100).

revolutionary approaches to population control, could the French hope to best their Communist opponents.

At the outbreak of the Algerian war, the clash between these camps remained unresolved. The problem was that the French defeat in Indochina was fundamentally overdetermined. Almost all of the charges leveled at French strategy and policy were valid and any one of them or any combination could plausibly have explained the collapse. With a number of competing explanations available, and no clear way to distinguish between consequential and inconsequential causes, it was difficult for professionals and outside observers to settle the argument let alone prescribe alternatives. In the face of evidentiary ambiguity, both camps tended to revert to their cognitive and bureaucratic priors. The overdetermination of failure in Indochina made Algeria the logical testing ground for these two competing approaches to counterinsurgency.

Model 1: Conventional Diagnosis and Conventional Prescription

All adherents of Model 1 tended to look to the military balance for explanations of French defeat. Most stressed the problems of inadequate resources, excessive dispersion of forces, and weak political leadership. The Chinese role in fueling the rebellion from 1950 on only amplified these problems. Politics mattered only insofar as it influenced the provision of manpower and materiel or impinged on the military commander's freedom to control operations. While Model 1 adherents agreed on these basic themes, their interpretations were far from monolithic. At one end of the spectrum were those who sought to reduce the dilemmas of Indochina to a simple problem of military operational planning. At the other end were those who saw greater resources,

particularly manpower, and operational refinements as the keys to the larger policy of suppressing colonial rebellion. Nearly all such commentators, including the majority of the French high command and most American military observers, downplayed or oversimplified the role of mass politics in the outcome of the war.

The dispute within the Model 1 camp was played out in the pages of the official French military journal, the *Revue de Défense Nationale*. In December 1955, Admiral Castex, a leading French military theorist, proposed an alternative solution to the French dilemma in Indochina. Castex's critique of French strategy was an extreme example of the application of military logic to the Indochina problem. According to Castex, the real French problem in Indochina had been a mismatch between the territory to be controlled and the military resources available. Noting the clear shortfall in military manpower, Castex argued that the answer lay in a massive contraction in the amount of territory occupied by French forces. By withdrawing to a coastal enclave that included Haiphong and perhaps Hanoi,³⁸⁰ and placing the 150,000 troops of the Expeditionary Corps within a defended perimeter of 150 km, France could have held its ground against any conceivable enemy offensive.³⁸¹ Within the perimeter, whose exact length would be scaled to achieve a troop density equaling that of First World War French defenses on the Western front (3,000 troops/km),³⁸² the French could resettle any Vietnamese who chose to follow them, and pacify that territory without fear of enemy infiltration. According to

³⁸⁰ Castex cited Wellington's successful defensive stand in Spain against Massena as the model for the Indochina enclave strategy (Source: Amiral Raoul Castex, "Les enseignements de la Guerre d'Indochine," *Revue de Défense Nationale* (Décembre 1955), pp. 3).

³⁸¹ Amiral Raoul Castex, "Les enseignements de la Guerre d'Indochine," *Revue de Défense Nationale* (décembre 1955), pp. 3.

³⁸² Ibid., Castex, pp. 3.

Castex, French strategists had failed to live within their means. The simple solution to this dilemma was to reduce the amount of territory defended.

Castex's solution was simple, elegant and entirely apolitical. To Castex, the problem was how to avoid defeat on the battlefield; the idea that military force was being applied to secure an intrinsically political objective was largely absent. By removing all political logic from the equation, Castex managed to fashion a solution that appeared to minimize the probability of defeat only by surrendering the object of the war – French territorial control in Indochina.

General Navarre, the *Général* at the time of the French defeat, argued that Castex's solution, while internally coherent, ignored French policy and interests in Indochina. According to Navarre, his late war strategy flowed from the two missions set by policymakers in Paris: the retention of Indochina within the French Union and resistance against Communist expansion in Asia.³⁸³ In order to fulfill those missions, Navarre, like all the French military commanders before him, was compelled to defend Indochina in its entirety. Navarre argued that Castex's proposed withdrawal option, however seductive, was tantamount to surrender. Once the most productive and populous territories had been abandoned, there would have been no compelling reason to maintain French forces of any size Indochina.³⁸⁴

In his memoirs, published in 1956, Navarre elaborated on his explanation of the defeat and placed the burden squarely on the shoulders of the French political elite. According to Navarre, the lack of a clear and flexible policy had doomed the French

³⁸³ Général Navarre, "Les données de la défense de l'Indochine," *Revue de la Defense Nationale* (mars 1956), pp. 273.

³⁸⁴ Ibid, Navarre, pp. 275-278.

campaign in Indochina.³⁸⁵ Over the course of the war, indifferent support, the lack of active mobilization of the French polity, and active subversion by the left wing governments had prevented the French military from achieving its goals.³⁸⁶ Navarre's analysis of the military lessons of the conflict remained largely within the bounds of Model 1.

Navarre identified a number of problems with French military policy: inadequate resources, a lack of unity of command, underestimation of the enemy, insufficient mobilization of the manpower of the Associated States, and a force structure ill suited to the terrain and conditions of Indochina.³⁸⁷ What was absent from Navarre's list was any significant reference to the perennial problems of French military strategy in Indochina – the failure of pacification or the endless search for decisive battle. His wartime strategy and his subsequent analysis of the defeat suggest that Navarre, though he acknowledged the importance of politics as it related to goal setting and the provision of resources, shared Castex's basic conviction that Indochina had been an essentially military problem. By highlighting the role of resources and the importance of improving tactical mobility, Navarre seemed to infer that a larger and more mobile military force could have succeeded where the undersized and immobile Expeditionary Corps had failed.

Having outlined his explanation for the defeat in Indochina, Navarre went on to link these lessons to the emerging campaign in Algeria, then more than a year underway. While Navarre acknowledged the surface similarities between the two conflicts, he was optimistic about the chances for French success in Algeria. Algeria was, in Navarre's

³⁸⁵ General Henri Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine (1953-1954)* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1956), pp. 316-317, 319-320.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, pp. 320-321.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, pp. 317.

opinion, a much easier test of the French state and military.³⁸⁸ He pointed out that terrain, proximity and climate all made Algeria an easier theater for French military operations. There was no external sponsor to assume the role played by China in the Indochina war.³⁸⁹ What is more, the problem of population control appeared far simpler. The existence of large settler population meant that the potential base of rebel support was much smaller than in Indochina.³⁹⁰ And Navarre argued that the Muslim population was less vulnerable to the appeals of Communist insurgents:

The native populations of North Africa are themselves, psychologically, closer to us than those of Indochina. If Islam tends to favor fanaticism and xenophobia, it makes them less susceptible to communist influence. If the [native] elites...that we have formed become in part hostile [to communist influence], the masses can be retained and brought into our camp.³⁹¹

Implicit in his upbeat assessment was the assumption that Communist ideology rather than anti-colonial nationalism was the motive force behind resistance movements in Indochina and Algeria. Above all, Navarre pointed to the much greater French national commitment to North Africa and Algeria in particular.³⁹² Mass being the chief ingredient for military success in colonial war, Navarre insisted that France must meet the challenge of the Algerian revolt through a massive escalation of means:

One thing is certain: that military action has not reached the massive character that alone brought – while limiting our losses – rapid and decisive results. Scarcely more than in Indochina we have not understood how to avoid the fatal onset of “rot” [colloquial reference to the loss of control in once pacified areas]. There are numerous gaps in the equipment, the armament, and the training of our troops that could only be overcome by a real national mobilization. Our troop strength – whatever has been said about it in official circles – is still too weak. In truth, troop levels have been calculated not according to the real needs

³⁸⁸ Ibid., Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, pp. 324.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, pp. 322.

³⁹⁰ The French in Algeria were to discover that the settlers were a double edged sword. While the French forces could count on the loyalty of the European population, they found it difficult to control their excesses. Vigilante actions by armed settlers frequently undermined French attempts to avoid overkill in pacification operations. Similarly, the presence of a large settler population place major constraints on French policy in Algeria. The political power of the settler block in metropolitan politics made them a veto player in attempts to develop administrative reforms or forge compromise with local Muslims.

³⁹¹ Ibid., Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, pp. 323.

³⁹² Ibid., Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, pp. 323.

expressed by the local military authorities, but instead according to what the government, relying on highly questionable political and economic considerations, considered the maximum number “possible.” This is a method that has always produced bad results.³⁹³ With greater resolve, expressed in greater manpower, matériel and patience, the odds of French success in suppressing the rebellion in Algeria were far higher than in Indochina.

Navarre went on to highlight military lessons he considered applicable to the Algerian problem. Having restated the importance of unity of command, inter-service cooperation, and the dangers of underestimating the opponent,³⁹⁴ Navarre highlighted the importance of mobility. By jettisoning their heavy motorized equipment, the French forces in Algeria would be better prepared to pursue and defeat a small, light and mobile insurgent opponent. Returning to the theme of manpower, he argued that massive numbers of troops were essential both to pursue the enemy and control the population:

The importance of numbers is another lesson of capital importance. Against an adversary who cannot succeed in his enterprises without the support of the population, the essential problem is the population in our camp while watching them, reassuring them, and protecting them. Only the omnipresence of troops in constant and confident contact with them [the population] will enable us to obtain this result.³⁹⁵

Navarre’s statement is a clear illustration of the “show of force” hypothesis implicit in Model 1. Under this assumption, the simple presence of large numbers of troops would enable the military to isolate, monitor and protect a largely passive, native population. Navarre shows little recognition that the population might sympathize with the rebels and be capable of independent action even in the presence of overwhelming numbers of French troops.

American military officers tended to see French performance in Indochina through this same Model 1 lens. As they had in the earlier years of the conflict, American officers castigated the French for a needlessly static and defensive posture in

³⁹³ Ibid., Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, pp. 325.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, pp. 324.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, pp. 324.

Indochina. Like Navarre, these officers tended to treat the political dimension as a subset of the larger problem of military resources. Policies that made possible the expansion of the native or French military forces were critically important as they might influence the struggle on the battlefield. In American eyes, the primary French failing on the political front was their failure to apply the Korean model of mobilization: the sponsorship of non-Communist nationalists in order to boost popular support and build a large native army.³⁹⁶

The notes of the formal debriefing of General Trapnall, the outgoing Chief of the U.S. Military Advisory Group (MAAG) Indochina, on May 3, 1954³⁹⁷ capture the essence of the standard American critique.³⁹⁸ While Trapnall acknowledged that the French had been engaged with a guerilla opponent in the early stages of the war, he argued that the growing size of the Viet Minh regular forces and the scale of U.S. military assistance had transformed the war into a conventional contest. To make progress in Indochina, the French had to improve their conventional war fighting capabilities:

Since it is neither practicable nor completely desirable to meet the enemy on the basis of guerilla versus guerilla, the ultimate solution will require the isolation of the Viet Minh from his base of supply in Red China and then overwhelming him by materiel superiority.....A significant weakness on the part of the French is their failure to project their system of field operations and staff planning beyond their experience in Indochina. Imagination is frequently lacking. Also evident is the fact that their limited experience in World War II has stunted their overall development in modern warfare. This is basically the reason underlying their poor staff work, logistics and operational plans. In addition, the French are sensitive

³⁹⁶ Laurent Césari, "Les tentatives Américaines pour implanter le "modèle coréen" en Indochine" in Maurice Vaïsse, *L'Armée française dans la guerre d'Indochine*, pp. 89-90.

³⁹⁷ The briefing took place roughly a week before the fall of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu. The full text of Trapnall's comments are included in "Remarks made by Major General Thomas J.H. Trapnall, Junior, former Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Indochina, 3 May 1954" in *The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, Volume 1, Document 41, pp. 487-499.

³⁹⁸ There were other officers who were more optimistic about French fortunes in the spring of 1954, chief among them Trapnall's successor, General O'Daniel. While the two Chiefs of the MAAG differed in their expectations for French performance in 1954 and 1955, they agreed that a plan predicated on an expansion of the Vietnamese army and a concentrated offensive against the Viet Minh armies were the path to success in Indochina. As noted earlier in this study, O'Daniel played a major role in the drafting of the Navarre Plan with its emphasis on major offensive action in Tonkin.

and touchy and loath to accept advice. We frequently encounter outdated techniques dating back to colonial campaigns and World War I.³⁹⁹

Having identified substandard mastery of modern conventional doctrine as the underlying cause of French difficulties in Indochina, Trapnall went on to lament the half-hearted execution of the Navarre Plan:

Few of these aims [of the Navarre Plan] are progressing satisfactorily. The training of the National armies [of the Associated States] is woefully inefficient and the series of tactical offensive operations engaged in during the 1953-54 fighting season, instead of retaking the initiative, has lost it to the Viet Minh. After a rather encouraging beginning with the Lang Son operation, Navarre's later operations reveal that he is following the same conservative, defensive tactics as his predecessor, General Salan. Although [Operation] Mouette⁴⁰⁰ was highly publicized as a successful offensive, it in fact was nothing but a reconnaissance in force with the objective of occupying a strong position and awaiting attack by the enemy in the hope of dealing him a crippling blow. The enemy refused to be taken in. The current campaign season has been dominated by the Viet Minh, and the present position of the French Union Forces is no improvement over that of last year. Dien Bien Phu is not only another Na San but a grave tactical and strategic error. The only hope for gain from the battle now raging is that the French can survive. The French have consistently postponed seizure of the initiative through failure to select and pursue vital military objectives such as the obvious enemy troop concentration depot and communications area in the foothills north of the Tonkin delta. Viet Minh leadership, on the other hand, has capitalized on this vacated opportunity by seizing and holding the initiative. The French battle corps, which was built up hopefully by energetic withdrawal of implanted units, has now been dissipated into four sizeable components....The lack of initiative which the French have is emphasized by the day-to-day reaction of the French to enemy moves and activity as expressed in recent requests for emergency assistance in the way of U.S. equipment and maintenance personnel.

French tactics are based primarily on defense, even though the French Union Forces outnumber the Viet Minh forces by almost 2 to 1, have overwhelming firepower, an unopposed air force, a balanced naval force and strategic transport capability....Viet Minh regular battle corps troops have been avoided unless the French troops are well dug in behind barbed wire or have astronomical odds in their favor.⁴⁰¹

Trapnall, like his predecessor General Erskine,⁴⁰² could not comprehend how a professional, Western military, lavishly supplied with American equipment, could fail to defeat an ostensibly smaller force. Their default explanation for the stalemate was a lack of professional skill and lack of offensive spirit. These critiques overlooked the skillful

³⁹⁹ Ibid., Trapnall, pp. 490.

⁴⁰⁰ Operation Mouette was the French attack on Lang Son mentioned earlier by Trapnall.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., Trapnall, pp. 495.

⁴⁰² Ronald Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the U.S. Army in Vietnam (1941-1960)* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), pp. 112-115.

but ultimately inconsequential French efforts from 1947 onwards to defeat the Viet Minh in open battle in Tonkin. Trapnall's suggestion of an offensive strike on enemy concentrations in the "foothills north of the Tonkin valley" is exactly what the French had tried in Operations Lea and Ceinture in 1947 without success. His recommendation is telling on two levels. First, the idea that a second Operation Lea would destroy a Viet Minh army many times the one that had escaped destruction in 1947, conveys the fundamental American misunderstanding of the parameters of the strategic dilemma in late war Indochina. Second, the uncanny similarity of Trapnall's recommendation to earlier, failed French operations demonstrates the shared, if deeply flawed, professional interpretation of the Indochina problem.

The frequent American references to the numerical superiority of the French Union Forces also missed the role of guerillas and local supporters in tilting the real balance of forces in favor of the Viet Minh. Whereas the French had to employ the majority of their force to hold terrain and maintain their lines of supply and communication, the Viet Minh could use their regional units and broad popular support to tie down the French occupation forces without employing their strategic reserve. The true comparison of the regular maneuver forces available for set piece battle gave the Viet Minh a distinct advantage of nearly 3.6:1.⁴⁰³

In short, the American evaluation of French performance was negative in tone and conventional in emphasis. French strategic failure was a product of defensive strategy

⁴⁰³ This argument is made by Yves Gras and Ronald Spector (ibid, Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 168-169). Both agree that American observers systematically and substantially overstated the numerical advantages of the French Union forces. Spector estimates that each side had roughly 90 battalions available in 1953, but the French had to devote two thirds of the force to static defense and pacification. With only 25 battalions to face 90 Viet Minh battalions, the French stood at a distinct disadvantage even on the conventional battlefield.

and professional incompetence. To most American military observers, it appeared that concerted offensive action with the manpower and matériel already on hand could have delivered campaign success on the battlefield in 1953 and 1954.⁴⁰⁴ The French failure to transfer real sovereignty to the Vietnamese compounded the problems of military strategy. American observers pointed out that so long as the French insisted on direct administration in Indochina they could not hope to mobilize the nationalist spirit and human resources necessary to break the Viet Minh army. This basic critique would serve as the foundation for the singularly ineffective US strategy of the middle phase of the Second Indochina War (1964-1968).

Model 2: La Guerre Révolutionnaire: Strategic Failure and the Virtues of Imitation

While the French high command and most American observers clung to conventional military explanations for defeat in Indochina, many veterans of Indochina, particularly the younger officers, embraced a more radical interpretation of French failure. Though few would have disputed the core complaints of more conservative Model 1 critics – tepid political support, inadequate resources, and civilian betrayal – these younger officers argued that the root cause of the failure was French strategy. According to the Model 2 critics, the French high command had ignored the true object of the contest in Indochina – the control of the local population – and dissipated the war effort in the pursuit of decisive results on the conventional battlefield. These critics saw in the methods of their Viet Minh opponents the basis for an effective response to this revolutionary warfare. If subversion and organization of local populations had delivered

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., Spector, pp. 168.

Indochina to the Communists, then Western success might be possible if they developed a way to organize and evangelize the local population in future conflicts.

If the Model 1 critics tended to focus on the battlefield fortunes of the Expeditionary Corps and the Viet Minh regular army, the Model 2 critics pointed to the failure of pacification, particularly in the Red River delta. They argued that the inability to clear and hold territory in the most populated and productive regions of Tonkin had made the more publicized conventional sparring of the opposing battle corps irrelevant. So long as the French had to devote the vast majority of their forces to an interminable series of clearance operations in the delta, the Viet Minh did not need a decisive victory on the battlefield. For officers who had spent multiple tours in largely fruitless pacification operations, the logic of this argument was self-evident. The center of gravity of revolutionary war was not the enemy army; it was the native population.

Though it took at least two years for the full *guerre révolutionnaire* doctrine to emerge, the basic elements of the French intellectual reaction to revolutionary war had coalesced within a year of the collapse at Dien Bien Phu.⁴⁰⁵ According to the early exponents of *guerre révolutionnaire*, the key to victory was to control two target populations: the population of the home front through psychological action and the native population of the affected territory through psychological warfare and counter-subversion.⁴⁰⁶ Effective psychological action would ensure sustained support for the protracted conflict in the affected region. The government and particularly the military, had to unify the country by silencing defeatists and energizing supporters.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., Villatoux, pp. 329..

⁴⁰⁶ George Armstrong Kelly, *Lost Soldiers: The French Army and Empire in Crisis (1947-1962)* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965), pp. 131.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., Villatoux, pp. 316.

In the affected territory, the key was to organize and evangelize the native population. By developing a politico-military apparatus to match that of the insurgents the French could overcome the perennial problem of pacification in Indochina – the vulnerability of “cleared areas” to subversion and “rot.” Military action would remain an important tool in counterinsurgency, but revolutionary war would revolve around the use of new psychological weapons modeled on those of the Viet Minh.⁴⁰⁸ As the author of the official review of psychological warfare in Indochina observed,

...in the psychological war pursued by the adversary, it is not enough to respond to fire with fire (even the terrifying fire of atomic projectiles) or with propaganda alone. The Western nations must, urgently, develop a complete organization for psychological warfare, and prepare themselves by serious efforts in this area, in order not to be rapidly overtaken by their adversaries.⁴⁰⁹

Victory in revolutionary war, then, involved the application of these new weapons to a new set of targets. The population replaced the enemy army as the center of gravity, and effective action against that center must include the use of psychological as well as military means. The logic of counterinsurgency as battle remained largely intact. The incorporation of political targets and political weapons did not change the core approach to problem solving. In revolutionary war, as in conventional battle, victory was the product of the application of overwhelming force to an opponent in order to achieve unilateral submission.

In short, the adherents of Model 2 sought to transpose the logic of battle onto the unfamiliar realm of mass politics. Based on their interpretation of Viet Minh success in Indochina, they believed that new psychological weapons would enable them to overwhelm the populations they targeted.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., Paret, pp. 101.

⁴⁰⁹ Capitaine Prestat as cited in *ibid.*, Villatoux, pp. 318.

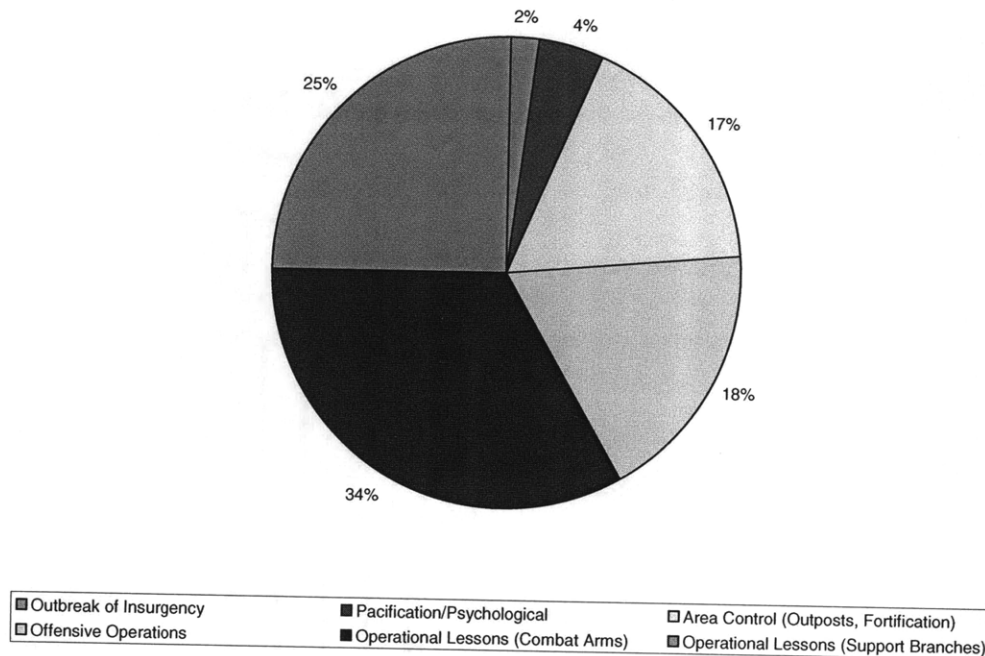
The Lessons of Indochina Study: Calling for Model 2, Recounting Model 1, Ignoring Model 3

In the immediate aftermath of the Geneva conference, the French General Staff under General Ely commissioned a comprehensive review of the campaign in Indochina.⁴¹⁰ This study, completed a year later and issued in three volumes, gives us a representative snapshot of French professional opinion in the immediate postwar period. On one level, the study is a candid and direct indictment of a French war effort rooted in conventional military response to insurgency. It accurately details the serial failures of French pacification and suggests that the solution to similar challenges might lie in some Model 2 strategy focused on the population. At the same time, the bulk of the work, measured by volume, is devoted to an exhaustive accounting of the tactical and operational lessons of the military struggle. Where a mere six pages are devoted to the problem of pacification, well over 30 are spent recounting the technical evolution of fixed fortifications and outposts in Indochina.⁴¹¹ The work as a whole demonstrates the tension between a largely upbeat assessment of French performance measured in purely military terms and the depressing realization that these innovations had failed to influence political outcomes in any meaningful sense.

⁴¹⁰ This section focuses on the core study commissioned by General Ely and issued in three volumes in May 1954. Colonel Nemo, an influential commander and later contributor to the literature on revolutionary war, led a parallel three volume study entitled *Guerre en Surface au Tonkin de 1946 à 1954* (Source: Alexander Zeroudakis, "From Indochina to Algeria: Counter-Insurgency Lessons" in Martin Alexander, Martin Evans, J.F.V. Keiger, *The Algerian War and the French Army, 1954-1962: Experiences, Images, Testimonies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd, 2002), pp. 43.

⁴¹¹ There a number of other examples of this skew in favor of operational routines. Though the French never possessed more than 28 helicopters in Indochina, more pages (7 pages vs. 6) are devoted to their operations in Indochina than are devoted to the problem of pacification (Source: Croizat, pp. 299).

Official Lessons Learned Study: Content Analysis



Decisive Battle

The study levels a rather harsh judgment on the French search for decisive battle with the Viet Minh regular army. On a strictly technical level, the study highlights the operational challenges of forcing decisive battle on an elusive opponent. On a more fundamental level, the study acknowledges the secondary importance of the search for a modern Cannae in Indochina:

Operations led us to take the offensive in Viet Minh territory, either in the form of raids, or by penetration into enemy areas in the hope of attracting and destroying its forces.

Such activities were but incidental. The real and continuous struggle took place in the regions we wished to control, namely the two deltas and certain portions of the central coast where there was a high population density and the most fertile lands. The “war without front” that was fought during eight years had as its basic goal the support of a population most often found in villages.⁴¹²

The study proceeds to highlight the fundamental and perhaps insuperable obstacles to the use of encirclement tactics in offensive pacification and set piece battle.

⁴¹² Ibid., Croizat (tr.), pp. 51.

The first problem was to locate the enemy.⁴¹³ In territory where the population was either sympathetic with the rebels or simply neutral, this task could only be accomplished by the use of converging columns. This approach demanded tremendous skill and exquisite synchronization of movement in terrain that impeded the flexible application of conventional military force.⁴¹⁴ The French commander had to maneuver large, motorized and dismounted forces into position without alerting his quarry.⁴¹⁵ Once in position, he had to close the net without allowing the Viet Minh units an opportunity to escape. Only with a firm cordon in place could he hope to bring French advantages in artillery and airpower to bear on a pinned and helpless opponent. Successful encirclement required great skill, substantial luck and overwhelming numerical strength; according to the study, late war operations in the Red River delta typically demanded a local, numerical superiority of 6:1.⁴¹⁶

There were numerous potential points of failure in any such operation. The failure to achieve surprise, the failure to maintain an impermeable cordon, delays in the application of artillery and aerial firepower, or excessive haste in the combing of the cleared area could leave the commander holding an empty bag. If the technical difficulty of the task of encirclement were not enough, the link between the rare success in encirclement and lasting progress in the campaign was tenuous. As the excerpt above indicates, the French command had, in the wake of innumerable costly attempts to force

⁴¹³ Ibid., Croizat, pp. 95.

⁴¹⁴ Large portions of this same section were devoted to discussions of the influence of different types of terrain on the problem of tactical and operational encirclement. Whether in the forested highlands or the swampy delta regions, the French found that restrictions on mechanized movement and fire support made the execution of encirclement operations even more challenging.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., Croizat, pp. 97.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., Croizat, pp. 96.

battle, come to understand that even large scale successes in conventional battle did not help them control the local population.

Pacification

If the study acknowledged the limited relevance of conventional battle and the overwhelming significance of population control, it provided few indications of a comprehensive solution to the latter problem.⁴¹⁷ The report opened with a blunt statement on the impotence of most pacification sweeps:

Clearing, sweeping, and related types of operations often yield deceptive results not compatible with the effort involved. In these cases, they irritate the population and demonstrate their relative ineffectiveness.⁴¹⁸

The study was even more pessimistic about the permanence of pacification gains. The use of fortified outposts and convoys to secure cleared terrain had proven enormously costly and largely ineffective. While the maintenance of garrisons in cleared areas might be unavoidable, it consumed most of the available manpower. As of January 1954, nearly 82,500 troops were “immobilized behind the wire of 920 posts” in the Red River delta alone.⁴¹⁹ In spite of this massive investment, which approached 90% of the troops under French command,⁴²⁰ the Viet Minh investment of a mere 37,000 guerilla troops in the same area had produced a steady deterioration in government control in the

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., Paret, pp. 100.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., Croizat, pp. 36.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., Croizat, pp. 86.

⁴²⁰ The estimates of the burden of static control missions (outposts plus convoy and route clearance) vary substantially. Based on Navarre’s estimate of 200,000 troops on Tonkin (Navarre, *Agonie de l’Indochine*, pp. 148.), it appears that the 82,500 troops devoted to the defense of the fixed Tonkin outposts alone represented roughly 40% of the force. Yves Gras, on the other hand, argues that the French mobile reserves in the same period represented no more than 10% of the total combined strength of the Expeditionary Corps and Vietnamese national armies (Source: Gras, *Histoire de la Guerre d’Indochine*, pp. 515.). In his memoirs, General Navarre argued that 90% of French and Associated States’ forces were tied down in pacification duty (Ibid., Navarre, pp. 46). What appears clear from a range of historical sources is that the French forces assigned to static control and route clearance represented well over half of the total force available.

delta. Still more disheartening was the realization that periodic re-pacification of the same areas often alienated the remaining supporters of the Bao Dai regime.⁴²¹

The study was remarkably candid about the limits of French success in pacification. The French attempted to pacify vast swathes of the ethnically Vietnamese Red River and Mekong deltas. As the authors note, however, the French only succeeded in holding areas controlled by the religious sects or ethnic minorities:

The success of Viet Minh propaganda themes on the Vietnamese populations and the weakness of our own political action rendered us incapable of raising any armed opposition to our enemies in regions with a large Vietnamese majority. Our inability to thwart the subversion of the Tonkin delta was the best proof of this. The only element that could still serve our cause was the racial enmity that the Montagnard people and certain ethnic minorities had for the Vietnamese of the delta and the coasts.⁴²²

The specific way in which the authors describe these outcomes suggests several important and unexamined assumptions about pacification. They, like many other contemporary French observers, tended to ascribe Viet Minh success to superior organization and skill rather than the intrinsic preferences of the Vietnamese population. This view of the political contests as symmetric and dominated by the actions of competing armies to mold a passive population made the development of a counter-doctrine seem achievable.

Model 2 Alternatives?

While the authors of the official study painted a bleak portrait of French strategy, their enthusiasm for Model 2 alternatives remained relatively abstract. On the one hand, the Viet Minh example, and the imitative efforts of certain French officers, suggested possible answers to the seemingly intractable problem of population control. On the

⁴²¹ Ibid., Croizat, pp. 40.

⁴²² Ibid., Croizat, pp. 156.

other hand, the counter-revolutionary approach lacked any degree of specificity. The authors of the official studies acknowledged the failure of early French forays into this area and were far more guarded in their claims than later proponents of *guerre révolutionnaire* in Algeria.

At the outset, the study's authors admitted the failure of French psychological warfare in Indochina. They argued that French troops had possessed neither the cultural familiarity⁴²³ nor the professional skills⁴²⁴ necessary to influence the Vietnamese population. The study also highlighted the absence of an alternative creed around which a psychological campaign might be built:

Captain P: "If we were unable to effectively fight Communist propaganda, it is because we did not offer a positive ideology as an alternative to Communism from which we would have come a doctrine and a faith." Colonel N: "The Franco-Vietnamese backed everything that was dying in this country: the traditions, the old people, etc. The Viet Minh used all that was new and emerging: desires, ideals, youth, etc."⁴²⁵

The report went on to argue that French efforts had come too late to influence the outcome of the war.⁴²⁶ Once again, the implication is that some combination of an effective message, greater skill, and more rapid reaction might have altered the larger political outcome.

Supplementary reports written on psychological warfare and the political military struggle sketched out the broad outlines of an alternative, Model 2 strategy. According to Capitaine Prestat, the primary author of these studies, the government's "riposte" must rest on three organizing principles: cutting the links between the population and the enemy, inoculating one's own troops against the influence of enemy propaganda, and

⁴²³ Ibid., Croizat (tr.), pp. 40.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., Croizat (tr.), pp. 39.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., Croizat (tr.), pp. 38.

⁴²⁶ Ibid. Croizat (tr.), pp. 41.

organizing the tools for offensive psychological warfare.⁴²⁷ Beyond this, Prestat argued that it was vital to employ reliable native cadre who would understand the grievances and motivation of the local population.⁴²⁸

Even the more detailed studies were short on the specific tools that might be needed in a future contest. What emerges from the postwar official reports is less a proto-doctrine and more an emerging set of assumptions about causality in revolutionary war. Proponents of Model 2 agreed that the population and not the enemy army was the center of gravity, and that psychological weapons were the key to attacking this new target.

Operational Routines: The Fruits of Exploitation

While the tone of the official study was deeply critical of the conventional bent of French strategy, the bulk of the study was nevertheless devoted to an exhaustive documentation of conventional military innovations. Nearly 80% of the study⁴²⁹ was devoted to technical and operational French innovations in areas ranging from airborne, riverine and amphibious operations to logistical support and combat engineering. The official study is a powerful illustration of the disproportionate allocation of attention and resources to operational innovation in the Indochina conflict. To use March's terminology, the study documents the triumph of operational exploitation over strategic exploration.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., Villatoux, pp. 317.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., Villatoux, pp. 317.

⁴²⁹ The 80% figure is based on a content analysis of the second volume: 287 of the 357 pages in the volume are devoted to discussions of the operational routines employed in Indochina and their relevance to future conflicts. The content of the third volume is even more decidedly skewed in the direction of technical and operational lessons.

The study makes clear the high level of organizational effort devoted to French operational adaptation in Indochina. The French devoted substantial attention to technical innovations, particularly as they related to mobility enhancements, defensive fortification, and armor improvements.

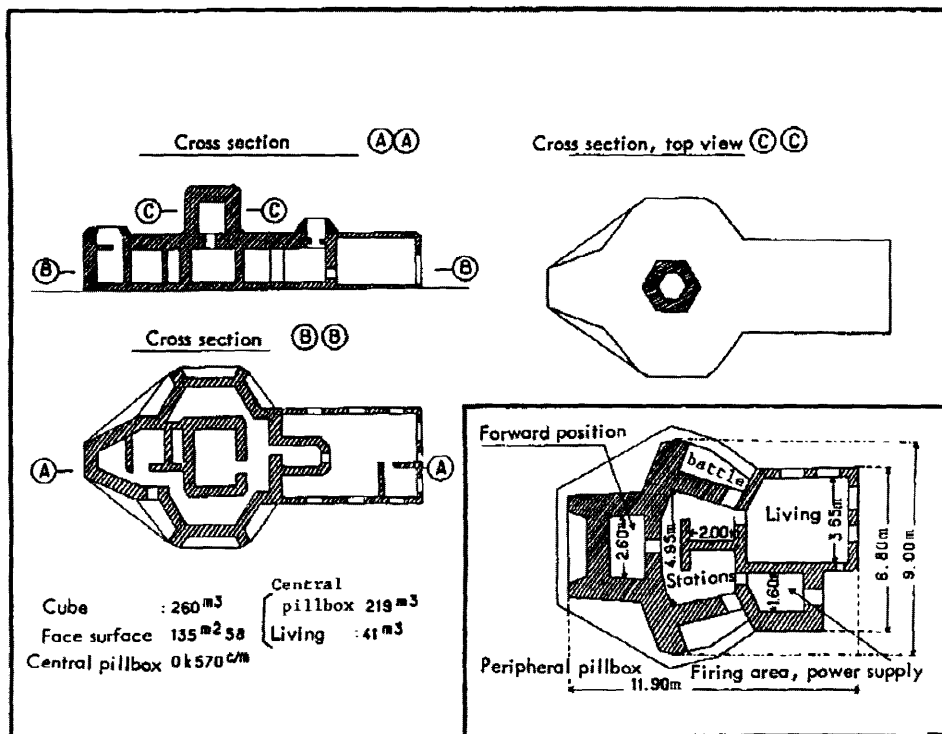


Fig.16—Double central pillbox and command post with a living area

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The bulk of the innovations, however, involved the development of new operational concepts for the employment of existing military equipment and forces in the peculiar environment of Indochina. Some of these innovations were attempts to overcome barriers to mechanized mobility. The development of riverine (see figure 18 below⁴³¹) and amphibious forces are the clearest examples of this type of mobility innovation. Others were attempts overcome the challenges of the “war without fronts.” Since the

⁴³⁰ Ibid., Croizat (tr.), pp. 135.

⁴³¹ Ibid., Croizat (tr.), pp. 181.

French did not have sufficient forces to maintain continuous lines outside the populated areas of the Red River and Mekong deltas, the problem was how to insert and then sustain forces in areas that lacked a substantial road network. The development of airborne forces and the late war introduction of air supplied, fortified bases were conscious attempts to overcome the twin challenges of limited manpower and vast geographical areas of responsibility.

Shock-action Group Operations

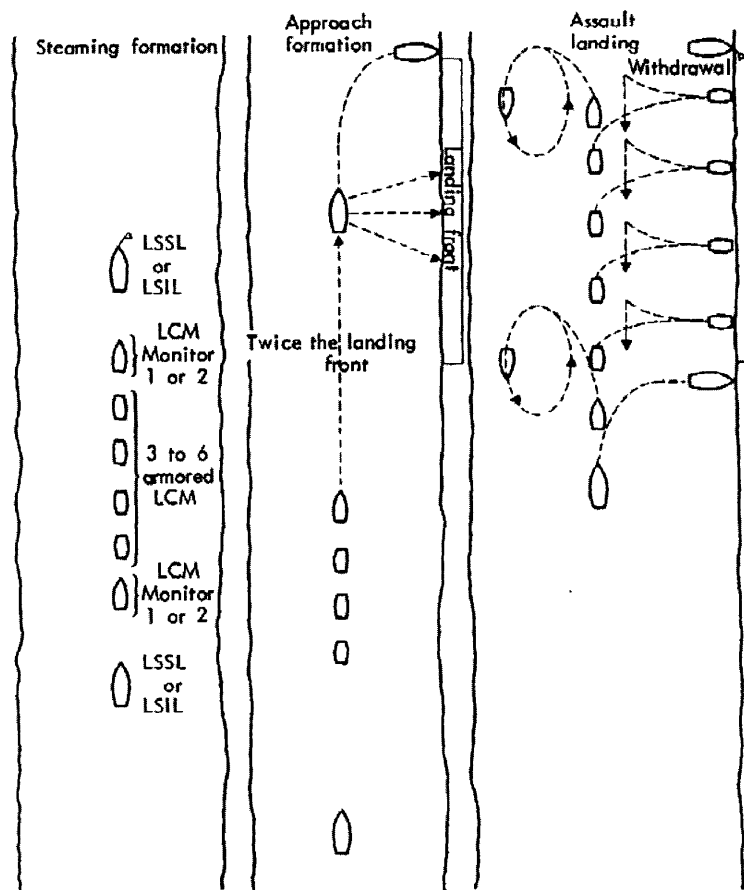


Fig. 18—Assault landing (North Vietnam)

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⁴³² Ibid., Croizat (tr.), pp. 181.

In many sections of these sections of the study, the authors documented complaints of lack of men and matériel. The unstated implication was that the provision of additional resources would have contributed to greater French success. The section on airborne operations highlights the constraints on the number of transport aircraft that prevented the command from meeting their desired target of lifting three battalions simultaneously,⁴³³ and the section of helicopter operations identifies the slow introduction of airframes as the chief obstacle to effective employment.⁴³⁴ A supplementary official study written in March 1955 argued that the early introduction of helicopters could have altered the outcome of the French campaigns of 1954:

....if the expansion plan for the helicopter fleet had been implemented a year earlier....the mobility that could have been given to the airborne infantry battalions, the best use to which they could have been put, would certainly have radically changed the course of events between January and May 1954.”⁴³⁵

Such statements by study authors and veterans reflected a persistent belief that technical or operational innovation might unlock the problem of conventional response and make decisive battle feasible.

Yet for all the emphasis placed on the negative effects of resource constraints, the official study contains ample evidence that resource abundance did little to boost French effectiveness in the campaign as a whole. The section on the use of artillery in Indochina is perhaps the clearest example of the tension between these two arguments – one

⁴³³ The authors argue that limits on aircraft and crews meant that the French command could never lift more than 2 battalions simultaneously. They went on to cite General de Lattre's comment on the minimum effective airborne force necessary to carry out a battle of annihilation: "The experience gained by the predecessors of Marshal de Lattre proved that it was futile to seek to fix the enemy and force him to engage in a battle of annihilation unless there were enough transport aircraft available to drop at least three battalions in his rear at one time." By this measure, French lift capability never met the proposed minimum level (Source: Croizat (tr.), pp. 247-248).

⁴³⁴ Ibid., Croizat (tr.), pp. 299.

⁴³⁵ March 1955 campaign report on helicopter utilization in Indochina as cited in Pierre-Louis Garnier, "La guerre d'Algérie et la consécration de l'ALAT," *Revue Historique des Armées* (No. 229, décembre 2002), pp. 18.

emphasizing the negative impact of resource scarcity and the other documenting the indeterminate impact of resource abundance. In the opening paragraphs of the section, the authors cited an experienced French artillery colonel's negative opinion of the contribution of that arm to the overall campaign:

Once artillery joins in ground warfare, not as would a local constable, but rather as would a riot squad, then the game is quickly compromised, for success...is fundamentally more dependent on political action than upon firepower.⁴³⁶

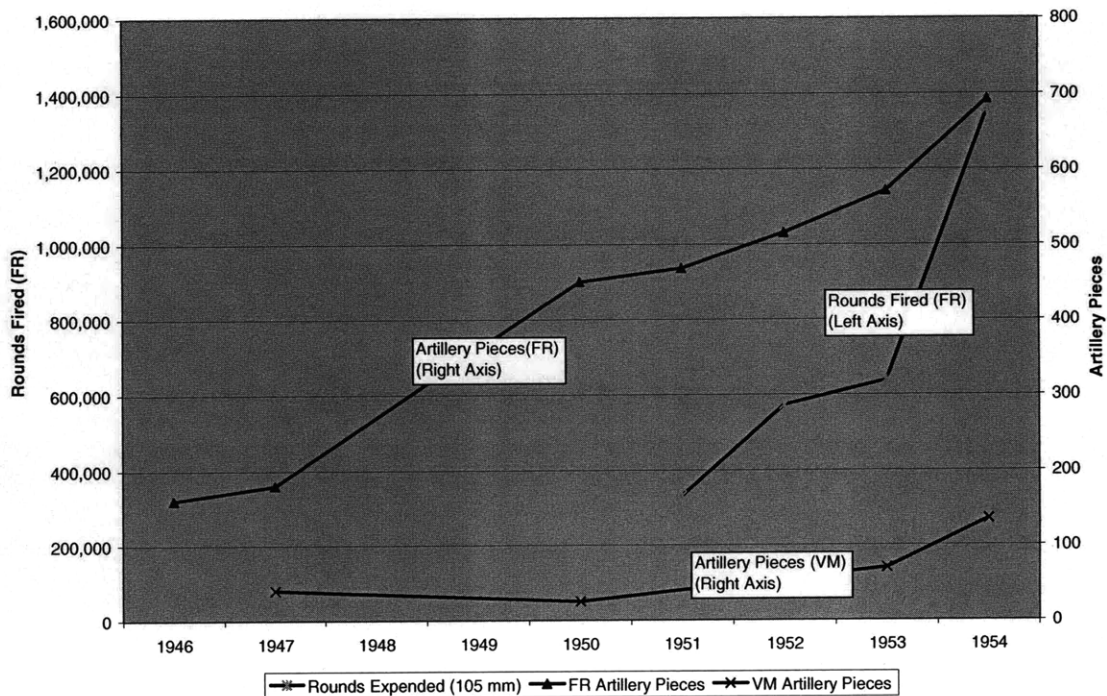
This one paragraph admission of the limits of firepower in counterinsurgency, fully consistent with the late war Model 2 critiques, was followed by ten pages of detailed discussion of operational and tactical employment of artillery. The section closes with a chart (see below⁴³⁷) that clearly shows both the overwhelming French relative advantage in artillery and the rapid acceleration in French ammunition consumption.⁴³⁸ It goes without saying that the striking French advantage in artillery (which fluctuated between 4:1 and 18:1 over the course of the war), and the rapid expansion in late war French ammunition expenditure, did little to change the overall course of the campaign. It does offer evidence, however, of the tendency to respond to stalemate through escalation of means and the generally lackluster results of this approach.

⁴³⁶ Colonel X, commanding artillery in North Vietnam, as cited in Croizat (tr.), *Lessons of the War in Indochina, Volume 2*, pp. 275.

⁴³⁷ The chart shown below combines the original comparison between French and Viet Minh artillery pieces (Croizat (tr.), *Lessons of the War in Indochina, Volume 2*, pp. 290) with the data provided separately on ammunition expenditure (ibid., Croizat (tr.), pp. 275). Together, these data give a sense of the steady expansion in French artillery strength and the acceleration in artillery rounds fired (105 mm only) between 1951 and 1954. To capture the rate of acceleration in ammunition consumption, I have used an annualized figure for the rounds expended in 1954 (the average monthly consumption multiplied by 12 months). The command fired 792,690 rounds between January and July 1954 or 113,241 rounds per month – roughly doubles the average artillery ammunition consumption in 1953 (53,162 rounds/month).

⁴³⁸ Ibid., Croizat (tr.), pp. 290.

Artillery Trends Indochina (1946-1954)



Summary

The French official study of the lessons of Indochina is important in several respects. First, it clearly shows the high level of effort devoted to organizational adaptation in Indochina. Far from being an inert organization, the French military made major strides in a host of operational and technical areas. The French military not only tried to modify its practices but invested significant effort in documenting the results in the wake of their defeat. Second, it provides a snapshot of French performance in Indochina that is largely uncorrupted by subsequent experiences in Algeria. Third, it records the growing intellectual consensus on the intrinsic shortcomings of French conventional strategy in Indochina. Fourth, it demonstrates the general staff's growing but as yet largely unspecified interest in Model 2 solutions to counterinsurgency. And finally, the content of the report clearly shows the overwhelming wartime emphasis on

exploitation over exploration. It documents the French tendency to devote attention and resources to process refinement, operational innovation, and simple escalation at the expense of strategic search.

Reacting to Defeat: The Return to Conventional War

While defeat in Indochina triggered a wide ranging debate between adherents of Model 1 and Model 2, the French military took it as an opportunity to return to the preferred task of conventional rearmament in Europe. From the point of view of the defense establishment, the cease-fire in Indochina marked the end of a decade long diversion of French military spending from modernization and European war to colonial war on the periphery. After the fall of Dien Bien Phu, military procurement and doctrine both shifted from the problem of revolutionary war to that of modern conventional war. Emerging from a decade of war in the Far East, the military was content to implement those lessons that bore on the preferred problem of conventional war and table or discard the rest. This decisive swing from the still unresolved debate over revolutionary war, to the simpler and more familiar task of European defense, ensured that the French Army would enter its next counterinsurgency campaign in Algeria much as it had in Indochina in 1945.

Indochina vs. Europe: Operations vs. Modernization, Core vs. Periphery, Conventional War vs. Counterinsurgency

The French military's desire to move away from revolutionary war and back to conventional warfighting predated Dien Bien Phu. Though a vocal minority of the

officer corps argued that revolutionary war was the real future threat in the Cold War,⁴³⁹ the senior leadership of the French military was solidly focused on central Europe and conventional defense. The Indochina war had set up a structural tension between the incessant demands for military manpower and equipment in the Far East and France's under-funded commitments to European defense. The end of the Indochina war released pent up pressures to focus on the restoration of French power in Europe. This anticipated change was triply gratifying; it made possible a shift from spending on operations to modernization/procurement, a return from the periphery to the core, and a break with the sordid and thankless task of revolutionary war.⁴⁴⁰

The French political commitment to European defense grew substantially over the first decade of the postwar period. Growing Soviet strength and calls for German rearmament combined to push French policymakers in the direction of heavy investment in Europe. Though the French initially agreed to provide ten fully equipped, active divisions,⁴⁴¹ this proved to be only the first installment on a deepening commitment to the common European defense. By 1951, France's obligations had grown from 10 divisions to 14, and by 1952 France had agreed to provide 20 active and 20 reserve divisions to NATO.⁴⁴² These paper commitments represented major future liabilities in terms of manpower allocation and capital investments. With inflation running at 25% and 40% of

⁴³⁹ General L.M. Chassin, "Vers un encirclement de l'Occident," *Revue de Défense Nationale*, May 1956, pp. 548; Colonel Nemo, "La guerre dans la foule," *Revue de Défense Nationale*, June 1956.

⁴⁴⁰ The dual benefit is most evident when compared with the American dilemma in Korea. In that conflict, the institutional powers argued that spending in Korea threatened more vital capital investments in Europe and the U.S.. As General Bradley pointed out after the relief of General Macarthur, Korea was the "wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time." Nevertheless, the war in Korea had the saving grace of being conventional in nature. The French war in Indochina was twice as distasteful – it involved a diversion to the peripheral operations and counterinsurgency.

⁴⁴¹ Jean-Charles Jauffret, "L'Armée et l'Algérie en 1954," *Revue historique des armées*, No. 187, June 1992, pp. 18.

⁴⁴² Anthony Clayton, *Three Marshals of France: Leadership After Trauma* (Exeter, UK: Brassey's, 1992), pp. 183.

the defense budget devoted to the war in Indochina,⁴⁴³ the French state and military faced a looming crisis in its overall defense policy.

The Indochina war, particularly after the influx of Chinese aid in 1950, set up three distinct tradeoffs: operations vs. modernization, periphery vs. core, and conventional war vs. counterinsurgency. In 1948, personnel costs and operations spending combined to consume 87% of French Army spending. Even the 13% of the budget devoted to capital equipment was split between the needs of the Expeditionary Corps in Indochina and the unfulfilled commitments to European defense.⁴⁴⁴ Modernization and technical innovation were squeezed out by operations, and even the less taxed navy and air force struggled to train and modernize under the austere funding environment imposed by Indochina.⁴⁴⁵

Contemporary evidence makes it abundantly clear that, even in the midst of the Indochina war, the French military establishment preferred to focus on European defense. Even before Chinese entry in 1950, it was clear that Indochina was the “ball and chain” that prevented rapid French rearmament in Europe.⁴⁴⁶ Among senior French officers, the European clique was clearly ascendant.⁴⁴⁷ The institutional army’s reluctance to sacrifice its preferred mission and its modernization plans explains the tendency during the Indochina conflict to send reinforcements in battalion increments. Once Chinese escalation had made manpower and materiel pressures more acute, the French army sought to cut back its commitment in Indochina to safeguard its European mission. In the

⁴⁴³ Ibid., Clayton, pp. 183.

⁴⁴⁴ Michel L. Martin, *Warriors to Managers: The French Military Establishment since 1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981), pp. 366-367.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., Martin, pp. 60-63.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., D. Domergue-Cloarec, pp. 97.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., Tertrais, pp. 395.

wake of a 1953 inspection tour of Korea and Indochina, Marshal Juin, the senior ranking officer in the French army and hero of the Second World War, made his opinion clear to the government:

It is necessary that we now search for ways to reduce our spending in the Far East....savings that could be applied to metropolitan defense, where money is obviously short.⁴⁴⁸

After his return to Europe, Juin continued to argue that the impact of the Indochina war on French commitments in Europe had become a source of tension within NATO circles:

The handicap imposed on French rearmament in Europe by our effort in Indochina has been made in clear in inter-allied meetings. Counted in terms of large units, this handicap is estimated to be on the order of a dozen divisions. Now this figure is occasionally contested in certain foreign military circles. The tendency having been to insinuate an exaggeration of French estimates, sometimes going so far as to estimate that the return of the Expeditionary Corps would only allow France to add 3 to 4 divisions to her military potential in the West.⁴⁴⁹

Several months later, General Navarre's request for 78,000 additional troops for his 1954 and 1955 offensives made a decision on the manpower tradeoff unavoidable. The French General Staff's report on his request made it clear that meeting the commander's demands would involve deeply uncomfortable shifts in French defense policy including the extension of overseas tours and the politically unpopular dispatch of draftees to Indochina. More important, the staff indicated that the reinforcements would involve the transfer of 3-4 division equivalents from Europe to the Far East. The report's conclusions left little doubt that the request would be denied on these grounds:

In the final analysis, it appears that the satisfaction of General Navarre's request [for 78,000 reinforcements], by French national resources alone, is technically possible at the cost of the disruption of our defense in Europe.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁸ Maréchal Juin, "Rapport de la mission effectuée du 13 février au 7 mars 1953 par le maréchal Juin" as cited in Tertrais, *La piastre et le fusil*, pp. 394.

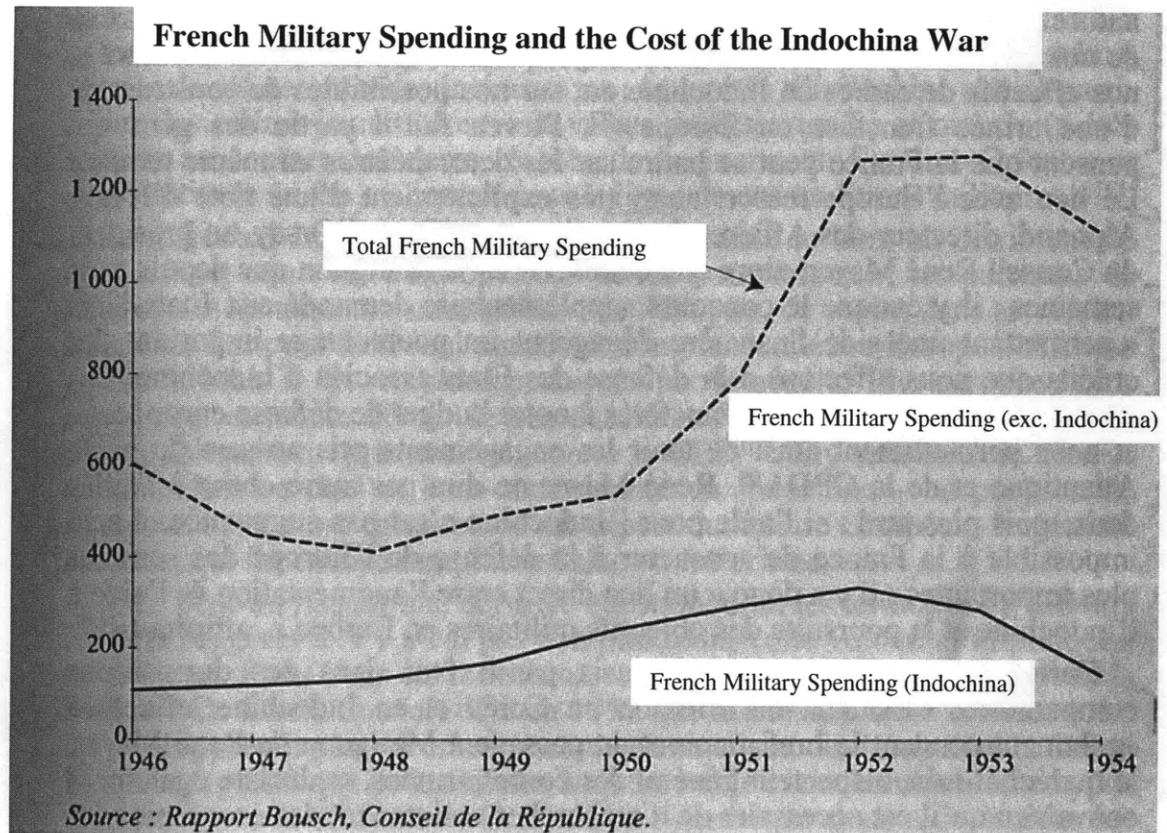
⁴⁴⁹ Maréchal Juin, "Note signée Juin du mai 1953" as cited in Tertrais, *La piastre et le fusil*, pp. 395.

⁴⁵⁰ Secrétariat d'État à la guerre, état-major des forces armées, "Étude sommaire sur l'envoi de forces supplémentaires en Indochine, 27 avril 1954" as cited in Tertrais, *La piastre et le fusil*, pp. 396.

After the outbreak of the war in Korea, the French found a partial solution to their dilemma in the form of American aid. The French government made it clear to their American counterparts that they could not simultaneously meet their commitments in Europe and Indochina.⁴⁵¹ Just as they used Vietnamese manpower to meet the shortfalls in professional troops, the French military used American equipment to offset their own material weakness. The surge in American material assistance and financial aid after 1950 made it possible for the French to divert a significant portion of their own capital investments into conventional rearmament in Europe. As the chart below shows,⁴⁵² French defense spending continued to climb significantly after 1950, but less and less of it was devoted to the war in Indochina. While American aid could not overcome the fundamental labor constraint on French forces in Indochina, it enabled the French to channel scarce capital resources into European rearmament.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., Tertrais, pp. 394.

⁴⁵² Ibid., Tertrais, pp. 393.



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While the Americans hoped that their targeted aid would be employed in Indochina,⁴⁵⁴ the French military was not above siphoning American and even Associated States' aid into domestic rearmament. In 1953, the American aid team confronted the French command over the apparent transfer of four billion francs (\$11.5 MM (1953 USD); \$81.3 MM (2005 USD)) from the Indochina war into military aviation investments. The French acknowledged that an increase in the Associated States' contributions to the war had prompted them to redirect an equivalent amount into domestic military investments:

Under these conditions, the French government decided to use the 4 billion francs in order to keep certain military aviation production lines open (Mystère II and IV models); had such a

⁴⁵³ This graph is drawn from Tertrais, pp. 393.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., Tertrais, pp. 270.

decision not been taken, the financial difficulties would have forced us to stop the production at a time when offshore orders [for these aircraft] were being considered.⁴⁵⁵

Over the course of the Indochina war, the French military had been forced to scale back their modernization plans in Europe in order to sustain operations in Indochina. Though late war American aid infusions enabled them to pursue a much reduced, capital modernization program, they were still saddled with enormous manpower and operational costs. These pressures built up over the course of the war and set the stage for a decisive post-Indochina return to Europe and conventional war.

The End of Colonial War and the Modernization Window

The fall of Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva accords that followed set the stage for a basic strategic choice. France could continue to refine its approach to revolutionary war to meet the rising tide of unrest in North Africa. Alternatively, the military could shift focus to the long delayed task of conventional rearmament in Europe. The French state and military chose the latter. Though the high command and the government had ample and repeated warning of serious unrest in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, they opted to buttress their position in Europe and relegate the North African problem to second place.

The strategic warnings of looming rebellion in North Africa were clear. During the Indochina war, unrest in Tunisia⁴⁵⁶ and then Morocco⁴⁵⁷ had forced the overstretched French authorities to concede de facto independence without a major fight. These

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., Tertrais, pp. 583.

⁴⁵⁶ Though the French had had been eager to retain some measure of control in Tunisia, the pressure of the war in Indochina and the depth of local resistance to French rule forced them to grant first internal autonomy (the Declaration of Carthage, May 1954) and later full independence in March 1956 (Source: Anthony Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group, 1994), pp. 91-93).

⁴⁵⁷ As in Tunisia, the French made an early bid to maintain control in Morocco. When the dispatch of 105,000 troops by 1955 failed to quell the rebellion, the French decided to transfer sovereignty to Sultan Mohammed V in return for face saving concessions and long term military basing (Source: Anthony Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group, 1994), pp. 101-103).

revolutionary movements on the eastern and western borders threatened to infect the ostensibly peaceful Algerian department. The French command was also well aware of the potential for internal unrest. Violent French repression in the wake of mob violence in Sétif in 1945,⁴⁵⁸ and the manifest failure of moderate Algerian political parties to force major changes in the political status of the Muslim population, had led a growing radicalization of the local opposition parties in the postwar period. While the authorities continued to hope that moderate, French educated notables like Ferhat Abbas would remain the focal point of local politics, there was mounting evidence that a number of more radical organizations were gaining broader popular support.^{459,460}

The practical steps the French command took to forestall rebellion in Algeria were modest in scale and provisional by design. Though the high command sent a number of units returning from Indochina into Algeria in the summer and fall of 1954,⁴⁶¹ defense planning was squarely focused on meeting existing NATO commitments. Formations bound for Algeria were organized into Blizzard battalions, units optimized for operations in the Algerian *bled* but organized in a provisional status. The unit rotations and the provisional reorganization of the forces suggested that the French military considered the unrest in North Africa a temporary problem.

⁴⁵⁸ Estimates of the number of Muslims killed in the crackdown range from 3,000 to 15,000. For a more detailed treatment of the Sétif massacre, see Chapter 5, pp. 290.

⁴⁵⁹ The two leading intelligence agencies in Algeria drew attention to rising nationalist activity in the wake of Dien Bien Phu (Source: "Bulletin Politique Mensuel, Mois de Mai 1954, Service des Liaisons Nord-Africaines, N° 1301, NA/3," in Jean-Charles Jauffret (ed.), *La Guerre d'Algérie par les Documents, Tome 2, Les portes de la guerre, 1946-1954* (Vincennes: Service historique de l'Armée de terre, 1998), pp. 447-455; Général Kients, "Synthèse de Renseignements, Mois de Mai 1954, Alger, le 28 juin 1954," in Jauffret (ed.), *Les portes de la guerre*, pp. 456).

⁴⁶⁰ The French allocation of resources during this period betrayed a primary focus on Europe and conventional rearmament.

⁴⁶¹ In September 1954, the *Conseil supérieur de la Guerre* announced its intent to increase the garrison in North Africa from 91,000 to 128,000 by transferring troops from Indochina to Algeria (Source: Jean-Charles Jauffret, "L'Armée et l'Algérie en 1954," *Revue Historique des Armées*, No. 187 (juin 1992), pp. 23.

The Oujda-Nemours Maneuvers (March 1954): Show of Force and Atomic Experimentation

Eight months before the outbreak of the Algerian revolt, and two months before the fall of Dien Bien Phu, the French army staged a massive set of military maneuvers in a mountainous area between Oujda and Nemours along the Moroccan border. These maneuvers, which involved nearly all the operational forces in Algeria, significant portions of the garrison of Morocco, and significant air and naval assets, provide a window into the French army's thinking on both colonial war and conventional operations in the interwar period.⁴⁶² First, these maneuvers made clear the army's undiminished attachment to the Model 1 approach to colonial policing. Even after countless traditional pacification strategies had failed in Indochina, senior commanders clearly believed that a muscular demonstration of French military power in the unsettled rural regions of Algeria might dampen popular support for proto-insurgent groups. Second, the French command's operational simulations of the tactical employment of nuclear weapons reveal an army eager to innovate within the bounds of its preferred mission set. Together, these elements provide evidence of the power of intrinsic preferences and beliefs in shaping the interpretation of past experience and prospective strategic choice.

By 1954, the local French command was aware of the threat of rebellion in Algeria and eager to forestall it. Successive commanders and intelligence chiefs had identified a hardening of radical resistance groups and the relative weakness of the

⁴⁶² The primary materials cited in this section are drawn from Jauffret's compilation of documents : *La Guerre d'Algérie par les Documents, Tome 2: Les portes de la guerre: des occasions manquées à l'insurrection* (Chateau de Vincennes: Service Historique de l'armée de Terre, 1998).

French forces of order. A riot in the town of Nédroma in October 1953 raised concerns among military and intelligence officials that discontent with French administration had begun to take the shape of organized political resistance. Though the Nédroma riot was relatively small, the direct attacks on French administrators and citizens and the wide distribution of subversive tracts were important departures from the post 1945 norm.⁴⁶³ The sharp French response to the uprisings calmed the situation, but left informed observers with few illusions as to the permanence of the resolution. Describing the volatile state of the region over the preceding two to three years, a senior French intelligence officer observed that, “Several “demonstrations of force” made by us have had only passing effects.”⁴⁶⁴

These doubts did not influence the high command’s decision to mount a major set of maneuvers predicated on this exact theory of colonial policing. Though the military maneuvers of March 1954 were not pacification operations per se, they were a conscious attempt to use conventional military exercises to use French military power to cow a restive population into submission. The combined operations involving airborne landings, mechanized operations, and extensive air to ground support were designed to impress the inhabitants of the same region that had produced the Nédroma uprising the previous year. Official documents reveal a two pronged strategy, combining the show of military force with extensive, constructive contact with local notables.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶³ Ibid., Jauffret, *Les portes de la guerre*, pp. 363.

⁴⁶⁴ Paul Henri Schoen, Chef du Service des Liaisons Nord-Africains (SLNA), “ Note sur la situation politique de la Region Marina-Nedroma, Quelques suggestions pour la redresser, 7 janvier 1954” in Jauffret, *Les portes de la guerre*, pp. 365.

⁴⁶⁵ Colonel Cointet de Fillain, “Synthèse sur l’état d’esprit des populations, Période du 25 février au 25 mars 1954,” in Jauffret (ed.), *Les portes de la guerre*, pp. 566.

Early appraisals of the psychological impact of the Oudja-Nemours maneuvers were very upbeat. Official reports stated that the show of force and the contact with local notables had had their desired effect:

On the local level, it is incontestable that the maneuvers made a favorable impression on the population. The concentration of our military forces, and their movement among the populations upon whom the P.P.A. [one of the major Algerian resistance parties] had sought to impose their will, reassured the Europeans [the colon settlers] and calmed the Muslims.⁴⁶⁶

This same report went on to suggest that a combination of demonstrations of force and public works projects would stabilize the situation:

Independently of the contacts that were made with the chiefs, notables and the natives, the implementation of all our public works (roads, trails, wells, irrigation canals or simple watering holes) should have the most positive influence on the development of these populations in a way that is most favorable to our prestige. It is in short the policy of contact, inspired by the formulas of Bugeaud and Lyautey, to which we must return. This policy should constitute one of the surest ways if not to roll back nationalism, at the very least to prevent it from developing in an anti-French vein.⁴⁶⁷

These comments were representative of official opinion on the Oudja-Nemours operations. The command appeared unanimous in its judgment that a robust display of force and renewed administrative involvement were an answer both to the acute problem of local agitation and the chronic problem of rising Arab and Muslim nationalism.⁴⁶⁸ The belief in the power of these measures, consciously modeled on the methods of the nineteenth century conquerors of Algeria and Morocco, was undiminished by the recent and repeated failure of similar strategies in Indochina.

⁴⁶⁶ Commandant Petit, "Synthèse sur l'état d'esprit des populations, 31 mars 1954" in *La Guerre d'Algérie par les Documents, Tome 2: Les portes de la guerre: des occasions manquées à l'insurrection* (Chateau de Vincennes: Service Historique de l'armée de Terre, 1998), pp. 566.

⁴⁶⁷ Commandant Petit, "Synthèse sur l'état d'esprit des populations, 31 mars 1954" in Jauffret, *La Guerre d'Algérie par les Documents, Tome 2: Les portes de la guerre: des occasions manquées à l'insurrection* (Chateau de Vincennes: Service Historique de l'armée de Terre, 1998), pp. 566.

⁴⁶⁸ For a similar official appraisal of the psychological impact of the maneuvers, see Capitaine Brosse, "Etat d'esprit des populations dans la region des manoeuvres, 29 mars 1954," in *La Guerre d'Algérie par les Documents, Tome 2: Les portes de la guerre: des occasions manquées à l'insurrection* (Chateau de Vincennes: Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, 1998), pp. 568-569.

Even as the French authorities congratulated themselves on the positive, psychological impact of the maneuvers, the local command was trumpeting the results of the atomic weapons simulations carried out in the course of the exercises. General Callies, the senior French military commander in Algeria and the organizer of the maneuvers, could not contain his excitement over the significance of these experiments:

The maneuvers demonstrated that the introduction of nuclear explosives brings to the military art a revolution at least as significant as the advent of gunpowder....In short, modern war has become as different from the last war [WWII] as the wars of classical antiquity were from the Napoleonic era...⁴⁶⁹

Callies went on to argue that the simulations revealed a transformation of classical warfare and a need to rethink existing notions of firepower, spatial dispersion, speed, and agility:

Nuclear explosives force us to abandon all known formulas, to rethink completely all problems....More than ever it is the swiftest and the most flexible who will win. It is also those with the greatest intellectual flexibility who will adapt most rapidly to these new forms of war and will know how to prepare for atomic war et not simply prolong to the point to disaster the outdated classical forms of war.⁴⁷⁰

Callies' commentary on the atomic experiments reveals a French military class eager to innovate in the realm of conventional warfare. Organizational and doctrinal change, even revolutionary change, was acceptable and even desirable so long as the object of war remained the defeat of enemy armies. What is striking is the absence of any similarly far reaching observations on the French military's approach to revolutionary warfare.

Though Callies was well aware of the threat of imminent rebellion in Algeria, his own

⁴⁶⁹ General C.A. Callies, "Enseignements tirés des manoeuvres algéro-marocaines 1954 au sujet de la guerre atomique" in *La Guerre l'Algérie par les Documents, Tome 2: Les portes de la guerre: des occasions manquées à l'insurrection* (Chateau de Vincennes: Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, 1998), pp. 570, 573.

⁴⁷⁰ General C.A. Callies, "Enseignements tirés des manoeuvres algéro-marocaines 1954 au sujet de la guerre atomique" in *La Guerre l'Algérie par les Documents, Tome 2: Les portes de la guerre: des occasions manquées à l'insurrection* (Chateau de Vincennes: Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, 1998), pp. 574.

area of responsibility, and possessed only the traditional strategies that had failed in the eight year Calvary of Indochina, he was nevertheless primarily interested in the notional contributions of atomic weapons to future French warfighting.

Here is proof that an organization's enthusiasm for change is not a fixed value – it varies on the basis of the content of the changes envisioned. Innovations, even those that threaten the existing organizational hierarchy, that give militaries the capability to attack enemy armies in more effective ways frequently elicit positive and even enthusiastic responses. Innovations that involve major departures from the underlying beliefs of the operational code, or which require militaries to embrace solutions that impinge on the bureaucratic interests in autonomy, prestige and resources, generally elicit negative organizational responses. The introduction of atomic weapons, though it threatened to upset the old order, was nonetheless embraced by organizations that saw it as a way to improve their performance of core warfighting missions. Even as the trauma of Indochina approached its climax, and the threat of rebellion in Algeria mounted, the General Callies preferred to speculate on future atomic doctrine rather than confront the unresolved problem of counterinsurgency.

The Oujda-Nemours maneuvers provide a telling snapshot of the French army on the eve of the Algerian rebellion. Though aware of the threat of native unrest, the French command appeared confident that the combination of show of force tactics and public works remained a valid answer to growing Arab nationalism. Nowhere in the official reporting or strategy discussions in Algeria does one see evidence of the intellectual debate about the failure of similar traditional pacification methods in Indochina. The exuberant reaction of the local command to the atomic simulations demonstrates that the

French military was eager to innovate so long as such changes reinforced the focus on warfighting as distinct from counter-insurgency. Amid the references to the fundamental transformation of warfare brought on by the introduction of atomic weapons, the absence of meaningful commentary on counterinsurgency was deafening.

Summary

In the wake of the defeat in Indochina, the French military plunged into a heated debate over the lessons of Indochina. These discussions, both in the informal realm of professional journals and in the formal studies of the General Staff, revealed a split in interpretations of the defeat. For many senior officers, the problem lay squarely in the conventional realm; French commanders had failed because they had been denied the means to defeat the Viet Minh armies in the field. For a smaller but vocal group of Indochina veterans, the explanation lay in the disconnect between French strategy and the nature of the war. While most of these officers agreed that inadequate means had contributed to failure, they argued that the real issue was the failure to recognize that the local population was the center of gravity. The only way to avoid similar defeats in the future would be to develop a new set of strategies aimed for population control. The over-determination of the defeat in Indochina made it difficult to resolve this split between Model 1 and Model 2 interpretations. So long as proponents of each interpretation could point to convincing explanations for French defeat, the origins of French failure would be open to debate.

The actions of the French defense establishment during this period were curiously detached from the debates over defeat in Indochina. For the General Staff and large

portions of the political elite, the end of the war in Indochina simply offered an opportunity to return to the more familiar and more important task of conventional modernization and rearmament in Europe. The sting of defeat in Indochina did not set off a formal effort to develop new strategies or capabilities for countering revolutionary warfare. Instead, the prophets of revolutionary war remained in the wings as the rush to conventional modernization took center stage. Even for local commanders in an increasingly unstable Algeria, traditional colonial policing and the development of powerful new tools for future conventional war were the dominant responses. In spite of the objections of advocates of revolutionary war, and the rising wave of Arab unrest throughout North Africa, the French military was firmly wedded to aggressive modernization of its conventional warfighting capabilities. To the extent that population control remained a major part of colonial policing duties, the preferred response was Model 1.

The behavior of the French defense establishment between the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the escalation of the war in Algeria in late 1955 is a testament to the limits of experience and the power of theoretical priors. Manifest failure in Indochina and the emergence of an alternative set of Model 2 strategies in the waning phases of that war, did little to alter the priorities or strategic course of the French military in the short interwar period. Instead, the removal of task pressure marked the end of serious inquiry into counterinsurgency strategy. Far from moving forward in the areas of revolutionary war, the official establishment in 1954 seemed bent on a return to conventional response in European and colonial war. The French military did not build on its counterinsurgency experiences in the interwar period; it did very little to transmit and implement the

significant insights gleaned from the formal and informal studies of Indochina. An army that had endured eight years of bruising colonial war in Indochina would enter the Algerian war with a nineteenth century model of counterinsurgency.

Chapter 5

Revolutionary War Reprise: The Algerian War (1954-1962)

Theory and Prediction

The theory presented in Chapter 2 suggests that militaries emerging from counterinsurgency campaigns will engage in selective retention and active purging. The task utility of a given operational routine or strategy will not be an accurate predictor of its retention or rejection in the interwar period. Instead, militaries will tend to retain those things that are compatible with the MOC and core bureaucratic interests, and purge those that are not. The disappearance of immediate task pressure will increase the prominence of bureaucratic interests and priorities in the interwar period. In general, retention will be higher in the realm of operational routines than counterinsurgency strategies; militaries will find it easier to retain routines, particularly “dual use” routines that have utility in conventional war as well as counterinsurgency. In contrast, Model 2 or Model 3 strategies tend to provoke an immediate immune response from the professional militaries. Strategies that are incompatible with the cognitive framework and that undermine the core interests in autonomy, resources and prestige will be jettisoned. For these reasons, most experienced militaries will enter their second counterinsurgency campaign close to where they started the first. While they may retain some important operational routines, and “recall” certain lessons later in the second campaign, there will be a strong tendency for professional militaries to revert to Model 1 responses to counterinsurgency.

Over the course of the second counterinsurgency campaign, militaries will tend to struggle with the same cognitive barriers to effective response and performance

adaptation that they faced in the previous campaign. The violent symptoms of insurgency will produce an illusion of familiarity and elicit a Model 1 response. This response will produce mixed performance feedback that reinforces the commitment to the underlying Model 1 strategy – the learning trap. The first recourse in most cases will be to exploitation (escalation of means and process refinement) rather than a search for alternative strategies. Clear failure or stalemate may force strategic search, but the order and extent of that search will depend on the level of resources available and the level of civilian participation.

Summary

The Algerian case confirms the theory's predictions. In the presence of abundant manpower and limited civilian participation, the French military followed a relatively predictable path from Model 1 response to Model 2 stalemate. The initial reaction was to demonstrate French force and pursue the rebel bands. The failure to crush the rebellion in the first year led to a brief flirtation with Model 3 strategy, followed by a return to Model 1 escalation. Starting in 1957, the French military moved from Model 1 to Model 2, shifting the focus from pursuit to population control. While the manpower intensive Model 2 strategy stopped the growth of the rebellion, campaign stalemate elicited further military escalation in the Challe offensives of 1959 and 1960. Civilian recognition of the limits of the Model 2 strategy led to a shift to Model 3 policy and a failed military coup. The Model 3 strategies of the last two years of the war ended in failure and French defeat.

Escalation in manpower and materiel played a major role in reinforcing French attachment to Model 1 and later Model 2 strategies and inhibiting the exploration of

Model 3. The two departures from this progression – the liberal moment in 1955-1956 and the move to negotiations in 1959-1961 - coincided with major civilian intervention in counterinsurgency strategy and were generally met with fierce resistance on the part of the professional military.

The French possessed a number of circumstantial advantages that should have improved their ability to respond to the Algerian rebellion. Recent and extensive experience in Indochina, and the professional debates that followed defeat there, should have enabled the military to respond more appropriately and adapt more rapidly. The legal status of Algeria and the presence of a million European settlers made Algeria far more valuable than Indochina. The value of the object translated into greater political resolve and the provision of far greater investments of manpower and matériel. The Algerian war also had the virtue of structural simplicity. Whereas in Indochina the French had had to divide their attention between the regular and guerilla wings of the Viet Minh, in Algeria there was no major external sponsor capable of underwriting a move from guerilla war to conventional war. In the absence of a Chinese style sponsor, the Algerian rebels were limited to a small scale, strictly insurgent strategy. Paradoxically, none of these advantages translated into major gains in learning or campaign performance. Faced with a simpler and easier test, the French state and military failed a second time albeit on a larger scale.

French Algeria (1954-1962)	Phase 1: Outbreak and Initial Response (11/54-2/55)	Phase 2: Liberal Moment and Military Escalation (2/55-10/56)	Phase 3: Revolutionary War (Algeria as Indochina) (11/56-11/58)	Phase 4: Challe Offensives (12/58-3/60)	Phase 5: Negotiations and Coup (4/60-3/61)
Military Commanders	Cherrière	Soustelle Parlange Lorillot (June 55-Nov 56) Allard	Salan (11/56-12/58)	Challe (12/58-3/60)	De Gaulle Crépin (4/60-7/61)
COIN Strategy	Model 1	Model 3	Model 2	Model 2	Model 2, 3
Operational Innovations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blizzard battalions • Mule units • GMPR⁴⁷¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAS • Harkis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morice Line • DPU • DOP • Resettlement • Helicopters • Pseudo-operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commandos de chasse • Rolling offensives 	
Success/Failure	Trend Failure	Trend Failure Episodic Failure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philippeville • Ben Bella • Suez 	Episodic Success <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battle of Algiers • Battle of Frontiers Stalemate	Trend Success <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challe Offensives 	Episodic Failure
Resources (Manpower)	Low	Low → Medium	High	High	High
Resources (Equipment)	Low	Medium	High	High	High
Civilian Participation	Low	High	Low	Low	High

The Setting

As in Indochina, the physical scale of the territory, the demographic and economic characteristics of the population, and the history of conquest and administration played important roles in shaping French response. The physical scale of Algeria was to be one of the major challenges to French counterinsurgency strategy. Covering an area

⁴⁷¹ Raoul Salan, *Mémoires: Fin d'un empire, Algérie française, 1^{er} novembre 1954- 6 juin 1958* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1972), pp. 96; *ibid.*, Villatoux, pp. 341-342.

almost 4.5 times that of metropolitan France,⁴⁷² the Algerian department was divided into three major geographical zones. Along the coast, a 50 to 100 mile wide strip of arable land known as the Tell region was the core of intensive agriculture and settlement. This region, with its large scale agriculture, industry and coastal cities, was home to the vast majority of the European settlers. Europeans were overwhelmingly concentrated in the urban centers of this region. Further inland, the high plateau and mountains of Atlas chain made subsistence herding and fruit cultivation the dominant form of economic activity. While these areas were far poorer in terms of arable land and water and almost exclusively Muslim in ethnic composition, they were nevertheless relatively heavily populated. Together, the coastal strip and the mountain regions accounted for 12% of the land area and the vast majority of the Algerian population.⁴⁷³ The vast stretches of the Saharan desert south of the Atlas Mountains were almost uninhabited.

The population of French Algeria was divided along ethnic and religious lines. The European population, collectively referred to as *pieds noirs*, totaled roughly 1.2 million on the eve of the rebellion.⁴⁷⁴ The Muslim population, divided between Berber and Arab ethnic groups, totaled 8 million. This striking ethnic imbalance was a product of a twentieth century population explosion among the native Algerian population.

⁴⁷² The area of metropolitan France, excluding Algeria, is roughly 545,630 km². The area of Algeria is 2,381,740 km² (Source: CIA Factbook, 2006).

⁴⁷³ Though data on population density in 1954 are unavailable, contemporary Algerian government sources indicate that as of 1993 fully 87% of the population was concentrated on 17% of the land area – a figure roughly corresponding to some broad measure of the Tell region (Source: U.S. Library of Congress, *A Country Study: Algeria* (U.S. Library of Congress, 1993), Chapter 2).

⁴⁷⁴ There is general agreement on the European population figure of 1.2 million. The sources put the Muslim population in 1954 at between 7.5 million and nearly 9 million (Sources: Jacques Soustelle, *Aimée et Souffrante Algérie* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1956), pp. 55; Germaine Tillon (tr. Ronald Matthews), *Algeria: The Realities* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1958), pp. 14; Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: Penguin, 1987), pp. 64).

Starting from a base of 4.5 million in the first decade of the twentieth century, the Muslim population had roughly in the wake of advances in medical care and nutrition.⁴⁷⁵

The rapid expansion of the Muslim population and the scarcity of arable land set the stage for a Malthusian crisis.⁴⁷⁶ The Muslim population continued to grow but lacked the natural resources and skills to provide an adequate supply of food. After the Second World War, mounting population pressure combined with several consecutive bad harvests had reduced the majority of the Muslim population to a precarious state. According to Germaine Tillion, who had spent a number of years in prewar Algeria and returned in 1954, the people of the Aurès region had gone from relative security to a state of “pauperization” in which 9 out of 10 families lived from hand to mouth.⁴⁷⁷

The French had first seized control over Algeria in the 1830s. Though they had found it relatively easy to secure footholds along the Algerian coast, it took them ten years to crush native resistance under the leadership of Abd-el-Kader. Though the French campaigns under Maréchal Thomas Bugeaud began with efforts to combine economic development and military force, the final stages of pacification were singularly brutal, with the French using punitive campaigns to suppress native resistance.⁴⁷⁸

The political order that emerged from the conquest was decidedly unequal. Though Algeria was made an integral part of France in 1848, the fortunes of its residents depended above all on their ethnic identity. The European settlers, of French and Mediterranean ancestry, controlled the major organs of government and the commanding

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., Tillion, pp. 24-25; ibid., Horne, pp. 64.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., Tillion, pp. 13, 24-25.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., Tillion, pp. 22.

⁴⁷⁸ For a complete account of Bugeaud’s campaigns and the hardening of his methods, see Anthony Thrall Sullivan, *Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, France and Algeria 1784-1849: Politics, Power and the Good Society* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon, 1983). For a shorter version of these events, see Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*.

heights of the economy. French administration in Algeria followed the patterns of European settlement; it was densest along the coast and in the major cities, and was practically non-existent in the overwhelmingly native interior.⁴⁷⁹ While Muslim residents enjoyed rights and privileges within this system, formal and informal rules restricted their participation in economic and particularly political life. Only those natives who adopted French language and religion came close to enjoying full rights under the French system; for the Muslim masses, the distinction between settler and native was stark and largely insurmountable. By the 1940s, this two tiered, and profoundly unequal political system had begun to crack under the pressures of demographic change and modernization. The resentment and unmet aspirations of the Muslim majority were to provide the fuel for the Algerian rebellions of 1945 and 1954.

The Origins of the Algerian Revolt

Three developments left the French order in Algeria vulnerable to rebellion in 1954. The first two were longstanding: the failure of political reform and integration, and the combination of population growth and economic stagnation. The third, the dramatic reduction in the French security presence in Algeria, was more recent and the product of the successive strains of World War 2 and the Indochina war.

Parts of the metropolitan establishment had recognized the dangers of the political status quo in Algeria and sought to relieve the pressure through political reform.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., Soustelle, pp. 26.

Maréchal Juin, himself a French native of Algeria,⁴⁸⁰ aptly summarized the instability of the system in a memorandum dated January 1946:

The status quo then? It does not seem possible to maintain it indefinitely, even taking into the reforms already extended. The Algerian Muslim (above all the educated elite) visibly suffers from an “inferiority complex” that is revealed in elections, in the newspapers, in his daily attitude towards us, in his resentment (often justified) of our administration. He will not get past this, we believe, except by the hope of reaching full equality very quickly, with us or against us, or by the awakening of a patriotism that is Arab and Muslim.⁴⁸¹

By the late 1940s, the growing imbalance between demographic reality and political representation could no longer be concealed. Under the two college electoral system, the 1.2 million French *colons* elected 60 members of the Algerian assembly, while 8-9 million Muslims elected the same number.⁴⁸² Since passage of major changes in local law required a two thirds vote of the Algerian assembly, the *pieds noirs* were not only overrepresented but capable of vetoing any provocative reforms. As a result, the passage of a liberal 1947 reform bill through the French Assembly in Paris had no practical effect. Settlers leery of transferring power to the Muslim majority blocked the implementation of the bill, particularly the portions that called for expanded self-rule in majority Muslim areas.⁴⁸³ Blatant election fraud in the 1948 assembly elections convinced Algerian nationalists of all stripes that the *pieds noirs* would never willingly surrender meaningful

⁴⁸⁰ In addition to being born and raised in Algeria, Juin had spent the vast majority of his military career in Morocco and Algeria. A native speaker of Arabic, Juin was fully conversant with the cultures and underlying tensions of the French Maghreb. For a detailed account of Juin’s background, see Anthony Clayton, *Three Marshals of France: Leadership after Trauma* (London: Brassey’s, 1992).

⁴⁸¹ Maréchal Alphonse Juin, “Le nœud du problème algérien, assimilation ou séparatisme” in Jean-Charles Jauffret, *La Guerre d’Algérie par les Documents, Tome 2, Les portes de la guerre: Des occasions manquées à l’insurrection, 10 mars 1946-31 décembre 1954* (Vincennes: Service historique de l’armée de terre, 1998), pp. 117.

⁴⁸² John Talbott, *The War Without a Name: France in Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1980), pp. 24-25.; *ibid.*, Horne, pp. 69-70.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, Talbott, pp. 24; *ibid.*, Horne, pp. 70;

power as a result of moderate legal action.⁴⁸⁴ The severe economic pressure of the 1940s and 1950s only amplified resentment of the system and fueled radical agitation.

Whereas economic and political inequality was an ingrained feature of the Algerian system, it was the hollowing out of the French security apparatus in the 1940s and 1950s that opened the door to armed resistance. The French had long practiced an extreme form of indirect rule in the Muslim interior with local notables and a sprinkling of European administrators governing ever larger numbers of rural Muslims. In the two decades preceding the rebellion, the ratio of administrators to governed had fallen to new lows. G. Hirtz, the French administrator of the *commune mixte*⁴⁸⁵ of Biskra, was personally responsible for 80,000 Muslim inhabitants,⁴⁸⁶ while the lead administrator in Arris was, with his two staff assistants, responsible for 60,000 inhabitants.⁴⁸⁷ The problem was one of distance as well as population; the three French administrators in of the Aurès communes of Arris, Khenchela, and Tebessa held sway over a territory larger than the modern state of Israel.⁴⁸⁸ The police presence in these rural areas was little better. Unable to keep up with the expanding Muslim population, colonial administrators frequently complained that they lacked the mobile police and gendarme units to maintain civil order. According to Jean Vaujour, the director of French police and security in Algeria, the government had a total of 10,500 police and gendarmes to cover Algeria as a

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., Horne, pp. 70-74.

⁴⁸⁵ *Commune mixte* was the term used to describe majority Muslim communities in the Algerian department. Under the pre-1947 order, these communities were run by French administrators in conjunction with local notables. By contrast, the *communes de plein exercice*, were run along democratically elected lines. This democratic system was qualified by the forced allocation of three fifths of the municipal seats to Europeans (Source: Horne, pp. 33-34).

⁴⁸⁶ Grégor Mathias, *Les sections administratives spécialisées en Algérie: Entre idéal et réalité (1955-1962)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), pp. 25.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, Horne, pp. 34.

⁴⁸⁸ The land area of the three communes was 25,000 km², whereas the land area of the modern state of Israel is 20,770 km² (Ibid., Mathias, pp. 21; CIA Factbook, 2007).

whole, and these were overwhelmingly concerted in the areas of European settlement along the coast.⁴⁸⁹ Wary of arming the Muslim population, the local government chose instead to rely on *pied noir* militias to maintain the peace.⁴⁹⁰

If the dilution of French civil administration had been a function of neglect and population growth, the weakness of French military forces in the early 1950s was a product of the war in Indochina. Desperate to satisfy the constant demands for fresh troops, and determined to protect the forces already committed to European defense, the French military had stripped the Army of North Africa nearly bare.⁴⁹¹ In spite of growing unrest across the Maghreb,⁴⁹² the French had reduced the military garrison of Algeria from 110,000 in 1945 to a low of 40,000 in 1948.⁴⁹³ Though the French had managed to increase this total to some 57,000 by October 1954, and more transfers were planned as troops from Indochina were repatriated, only 15,500 to 20,000 of these were available for mobile operations.⁴⁹⁴ This left the French command in Algeria with roughly half the number of forces it had maintained in the area in 1945.⁴⁹⁵

The weakness of the administrative and security framework severely undermined French control in postwar Algeria. Without an effective administrative apparatus, the authorities lacked a detailed understanding of the economic crisis in the Algerian interior

⁴⁸⁹ Jean Vaujour, *De Révolte à la Révolution: Aux premiers jours de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1985), pp. 31-32.

⁴⁹⁰ Jean-Pierre Peyroulou, "Rétablir et maintenir l'ordre colonial: la police française et les Algériens en Algérie française de 1945 à 1962" in Mohammed Harbi, Benjamin Stora (eds.), *La Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004), pp. 146, 160-1.

⁴⁹¹ Jean-Charles Jauffret, "L'Armée et L'Algérie en 1954," *Revue Historique des Armées*, No. 187 (juin 1992), pp. 17; Jean-Charles Jauffret, *La Guerre d'Algérie par les Documents, Tome 2*, pp. 281.

⁴⁹² In the 1940s and 1950s, the French maintained upwards of 40,000 troops in Tunisia and 100,000 in Morocco (Source: David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria (1956-1958)*, RAND MG-478-1 (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1963), pp. 10).

⁴⁹³ Ibid., Jauffret, *Les portes de la guerre*, pp. 302.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., Jauffret, "L'Armée et l'Algérie en 1954," pp. 23; ibid., Vaujour, pp. 56.

⁴⁹⁵ The reductions in the French garrison were doubly significant as the French authorities had long relied on the military to compensate for the thin police presence (Source: Peyroulou, pp. 151).

and the development of armed resistance. While major intelligence agencies had detected a hardening of opposition in the 1950s, and provided strategic warning of possible rebellion, they lacked the detailed local information to suppress these movements. Factional infighting among the French civil and military intelligence units diluted the effect of these warnings on French decision makers.⁴⁹⁶ The dramatic reductions in military strength emboldened Muslim resistance groups and left the French few options should rebellion erupt. In short, the colonial authorities lacked the insight or the means to respond to growing unrest in the Muslim population. Unable to target its radical opponents, the authorities often resorted to collective responsibility or intimidation to forestall rebellion.

Tremors and the Quake: Sétif and the All Saints Uprisings

It is hard to understand the 1954 rebellion or the French response without reference to the Sétif uprising of 1945. For Algerian Muslims, including many of the future leaders of the F.L.N., the brutal suppression of the Sétif uprising was proof of the injustice of the political system and the French authorities' disdain for the native population. For metropolitan political leaders, it was a sign that the restoration of French authority in the postwar period might demand substantial political and social reform. For the French military, the crackdown was proof that nationalist violence could be put down through the massive and visible application of armed force. Taken together, the Sétif uprisings and the French response provided both the *casus belli* for Algerian separatists

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., Jauffret, "L'Armée et L'Algérie en 1954," pp. 19; ibid., Faivre, *Le Renseignement dans la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Charles Lavauzelle, 2006), pp. 15.

and an important blueprint for the coercive response of the French authorities in the winter of 1954-1955.⁴⁹⁷

The Sétif uprisings occurred on Victory in Europe Day, May 8, 1945. As the French and other allied powers celebrated the collapse of the Third Reich, the Muslim inhabitants of Sétif prepared to demonstrate in favor of independence. Though there had been warnings of political unrest, the local authorities allowed the scheduled parades to go forward. After a tense standoff between the outnumbered French gendarmes and some 8,000 Muslim marchers, a burst of gunfire led to the rapid cascade of violence. The Muslim protestors fell upon the local police and administrators and set off a broader wave of rape and killing. For five days, the mobs in Sétif and Guelma ran unchecked, killing a total of 103 Europeans and wounding 100 more.⁴⁹⁸ Many of the killings involved sexual mutilation of the corpses, acts that stimulated savage responses by *pieds noirs* and the security forces.⁴⁹⁹ Though the scale and brutality of the uprisings suggest pre-meditation, the uprisings appear to have been spontaneous. Only after the first burst of violence did Muslim leaders seek, unsuccessfully, to expand the rebellion.⁵⁰⁰

The French response was crushing and often indiscriminate. While the French command under General Duval sought to limit excesses,⁵⁰¹ there was an inherent tension between these prohibitions and the desire to make an example of the perpetrators.⁵⁰² Troops applied the time tested principle of collective responsibility, summarily executing

⁴⁹⁷ The French historians Bernard Droz and Evelyne Lever have argued that May 8, 1945 should be considered the true start date of the Algerian Revolution (Source: Bernard Droz, Evelyne Lever, *Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie (1954-1962)* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), pp. 33).

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., Horne, pp. 27.

⁴⁹⁹ Anthony Clayton, "The Sétif Uprising of May 1945," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 11; *ibid.*, Droz, Lever, pp. 32; *ibid.*, Horne, pp. 27.

⁵⁰⁰ Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du F.L.N.* (Paris: Fayard, 2002) pp. 66; *ibid.*, Droz, Lever, pp. 32.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., Clayton, pp.

⁵⁰² Ibid., Meynier, pp. 66-67.

suspects, burning villages and bombarding many they could not reach.⁵⁰³ Vigilante attacks by the *pieds noirs* amplified the scale of repression,⁵⁰⁴ and the Muslim death toll far outstripped that of the initial uprisings. Though the French official inquiry put the number of dead at between 1,020 and 1,300,⁵⁰⁵ with some 500 to 600 attributed to military action, subsequent historiography suggests that the response was far bloodier. Western academic sources have put the number at 3,000,⁵⁰⁶ 6,000,⁵⁰⁷ 7,500,⁵⁰⁸ and 15,000,⁵⁰⁹ while Arab sources have put it between 40,000 and 50,000.⁵¹⁰ While the Arab estimates appear implausible given the scale and duration of the operations, most historians agree that the official estimates understate the number of Muslim deaths. As Alistair Horne has noted, even the official figure “represents a ten to one “overkill”⁵¹¹ in relation to the numbers of Europeans massacred....”; if the number of Muslim dead was closer to 5,000, the ratio rises to 50:1.

The Sétif uprising made a profound impact on all parties. For the *pieds noirs*, it confirmed their suspicions of Muslim savagery and justified intransigence on questions of political reform. Terrified of a repetition of Sétif, many *pieds noirs* farmers began to move from rural areas into the larger urban centers of the coast.⁵¹² For the metropolitan government, the outbreak added urgency to the reform movement the *colons* bitterly

⁵⁰³ These methods were not peculiarly French. The theory behind British “air policing” in the Middle East in 1920s and 1930s was broadly analogous.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., Clayton, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁰⁵ This figure was the outcome of the official inquiry.

⁵⁰⁶ Jean-Charles Jauffret (ed.), *La guerre d’Algérie par les documents: Tome Premier: L’avertissement, 1943-1946* (Vincennes: Service Historique de l’Armée de Terre, 1990), pp. 410; *ibid.*, Clayton, pp. 12.

⁵⁰⁷ Raymond Aron as cited in Horne, pp. 27.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., Droz, Lever, pp. 32.

⁵⁰⁹ Estimate provided by Teitgen, the secretary-general of the Algiers prefecture (1956-1957) as cited in Horne, pp. 27.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., Droz, Lever, pp. 32; *ibid.*, Horne, pp. 27.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., Horne, pp. 27.

⁵¹² Sylvie Thénault, *Historie de la guerre d’indépendance algérienne* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2005), pp. 42.

opposed. For Muslims, the uprising had been justified, and the repression additional proof of French iniquity.⁵¹³ Radical leaders saw in it the power of mass violence,⁵¹⁴ moderate nationalists the dimming prospects for peaceful evolution.

For military leaders far removed from the scene, General Duval's suppression campaign was proof that prompt and ruthless response by conventional units was sufficient to suppress future uprisings. Those officers closest to the events were the least sanguine. Almost a year after the events, General Henry Martin, the commander of French Forces in North Africa, noted the undiminished nationalist sentiment and described the situation as one of "superficial calm."⁵¹⁵ General Duval famously quipped that, "I have given you peace for ten years. But let us not deceive ourselves. Everything must change in Algeria." Neither man had any illusions about the inevitability of their success or the permanence of the gains.

From the end of the Sétif uprisings in May 1945 to the outbreak of the Algerian war in October 1954, Muslim resistance receded but did not vanish. As *pieds noirs* moved from the countryside to the towns and cities, the French authorities abandoned large tracts of the rugged interior. Leaders of various stripes sprang up in this vacuum. While these bandit leaders lacked explicit political agendas, they employed a familiar set of insurgent tactics to cement their local control: intimidation, attacks on police and loyalists, tax collection, bans of alcohol and tobacco, religious revival. As early as 1948, Grine Belkacem, a future leader of the FLN, held sway over a significant portion of the

⁵¹³ Ibid., Meynier, pp. 67-68; *ibid.*, Clayton, pp. 14-15;

⁵¹⁴ Gilbert Meynier, "Le PPA-MTLD et le FLN-ALN, étude comparée" in Harbi, Stora (eds.), *La guerre d'Algerie*, pp. 607.

⁵¹⁵ General Henry Martin, "Compte rendu bi-hebdomadaire situation en Algerie a la date 25 mars," 29 mars 1946, as cited in Jean-Charles Jauffret (ed.), *La guerre d'Algérie par les documents: Tome Premier: L'avertissement, 1943-1946* (Vincennes: Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, 1990), pp. 498.

Aurès. The French authorities, unable to exterminate these influences, avoided direct confrontation unless French military forces were made available.⁵¹⁶ Normalcy reigned in the urban centers of the coast while the embers of resistance smoldered in the interior.

When violence erupted again on a national scale in October 1954, it was led by a splinter group of Messali Hadj's political movement, the MTLD. Though Messali, the established leader of the Algerian radical movement, was not opposed to the use of force, he had chosen to forgo rebellion in favor of electioneering and the consolidation of his urban base.⁵¹⁷ The *Front de Libération Nationale* or F.L.N. was the latest incarnation of a younger and more militant faction of Messali's movement. Unwilling to put off a violent uprising, the leaders of the F.L.N. proposed a national uprising to expel the French. With fewer than 700 fighters at their disposal, the F.L.N. hoped that the act of rebellion would unleash Muslim resentment and overwhelm the authorities.

The rebellion began on October 31, 1954 with a wave of attacks against French authorities and Muslim loyalists, and the publication of political manifesto. Though the manifesto laid out a series of series of ambitious goals, the results of the first wave of attacks was modest: the roughly 70 attacks killed eight and wounded four on the first day.⁵¹⁸ Only in the existing bandit fiefdoms of the Aurès and the Kabylie could the FLN claim to hold territory. Writing after the war, Mohamed Boudiaf, one of the leaders of the uprising, explained that the F.L.N.'s three step plan for liberation. First, they hoped that guerilla attacks would encourage broader participation in the movement. Second, they would capitalize on growing insecurity to build a clandestine organization among

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., Peyroulou, pp. 162-163.

⁵¹⁷ Gilbert Meynier, "Le PPA-MTLD et le FLN-ALN, étude comparée" in Harbi, Stora (eds.), *La guerre d'Algerie*, pp. 608; *ibid.*, Thénault, pp. 43.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., Droz, Lever, pp. 59-60.

the people. And finally, they planned to establish a shadow government in a “liberated area.”⁵¹⁹ This plan, however poorly resourced and loosely reasoned, ignited the rebellion that would ultimately cost the French control of Algeria.

Phase 1: Outbreak and Conventional Response (11/54-2/55)

The French reaction was overwhelmingly conventional and military in nature. While the French government under Pierre Mendes-France and his cabinet articulated a mixed policy of limited repression and reform, the local military command under General Cherrière responded with large scale military operations aimed at crushing the rebels and cowing the population. In the opening weeks, neither the political leadership nor the military considered the uprising a prelude to general rebellion; both groups believed that prompt response could contain the threat and restore order in the Algerian department.⁵²⁰ As the suppression campaign dragged on, some military leaders proposed alternatives to Cherrière’s show of force strategy, but these proposals had minimal effect. The police crackdown was blunt as well, with the police rounding up 2,000 members of the leading political resistance group, Messali’s M.T.L.D., under the false assumption that they were behind the uprising.⁵²¹ Under the leadership of Cherrière, the de facto strategy of the authorities was to re-establish order by the display and if necessary the visible use of military and police force.

⁵¹⁹ Mohamed Boudiaf, *Le Monde*, November 2, 1962 as cited in translation in Galula, *Pacification in Algeria*, Appendix 1, pp. 254-255.

⁵²⁰ General Cherrière, “Evenements survenus en Algérie au cours de la semaine du 29 octobre au 5 novembre, Alger 9 novembre 1954,” as cited in Jauffret, *La Guerre d’Algérie par les Documents, Tome 2*, pp. 728; *ibid.*, Jauffret, “L’Armée et L’Algérie en 1954,” pp. 22; *ibid.*, Droz, Lever, pp. 60.

⁵²¹ The decision to “round up the usual suspects” followed the pattern set at Sétif. In 1945, the French authorities assumed that the Communist party had been the motive force behind the Sétif uprisings. In 1954, the authorities made a similar and not implausible assumption that Messali was the architect and Nasser the external sponsor. Both claims appear false in retrospect.

Civilian Response: Full Commitment, Limited Repression, and the Pied Noir Veto

The metropolitan government's response had three components: commitment, limited repression, and reform. First, Mendès-France emphatically restated France's commitment to the defense of Algeria. In a speech delivered to the French Assembly on November 12, 1954, the Prime Minister drew a clear line between French colonial commitments and Algeria:

One does not compromise when it comes to defending the internal peace of the nation, the unity and the integrity of the Republic. The Algerian departments are part of the French Republic. They have been French for a long time, and they are irrevocably French....Between them and France there can be no conceivable secession.

This must be clear once and for all, in Algeria and in metropolitan France as much as in the outside world. Never will France – any French government or parliament, whatever may be their particularistic tendencies – yield on this fundamental principle.

Mesdames, Messieurs, several deputies have made comparisons between French policy in Algeria and Tunisia. I declare that no parallel is more erroneous, that no comparison is falser, or more dangerous. *Ici, c'est la France!*⁵²²

The Prime Minister's stand was important on both a symbolic and a practical level. Unequivocal commitment to *l'Algérie française* was a signal to domestic and foreign audiences that France did not consider Algeria a mere colonial possession or protectorate like Indochina, Tunisia or Morocco. Concessions in Indochina or elsewhere were not be taken as indicators of French resolve in Algeria. On a practical level, Algeria's status as a department of France enabled the government to employ the untapped reserve of French conscripts and reservists. In contrast to Indochina, a war fought exclusively with professional and colonial troops, the Algerian war would be fought by professional soldiers and draftees. Access to conscripts lifted an important material constraint on French military strategic choice.

⁵²² Pierre Mendes-France as cited (tr.) in *ibid.*, Horne, pp. 98.

Though they insisted on the maintenance of French control and the restoration of law and order, French political leaders were keenly aware of the dangers of excessive force. To Mendès-France and his cabinet, the situation demanded “limited repression” and overdue political and economic reforms. Mendès-France called for the rapid implementation of the stalled reforms of 1947 and a program to expand Muslim participation in the local government.⁵²³ The French Minister of the Interior, François Mitterrand, eager to avoid excesses of Sétif, explicitly forbade military commanders to use napalm or high explosives in populated areas.⁵²⁴ Under no circumstances were French forces to respond to rebel outrages by imposing collective responsibility on local populations.⁵²⁵

The French police in Algeria had a foot in both the political and military camps. On the one hand, Jean Vaujour, the Director of Security in Algeria, insisted on the importance of civilian control. In the first hours after the All Saints attacks, Vaujour advised the Governor-General Roger Léonard to avoid the temptation to declare martial law:

I added, in conclusion, that I considered it essential that the civil powers alone remain in charge of the responsibilities for the maintenance or restoration of order, even if might be interpreted with some suspicion by the army: the problem that the government faces is above all a political one. To declare martial law, to rely on military leaders to make the fundamental decisions, is to put in motion a heavy machine that we will only be able to control with difficulty tomorrow.⁵²⁶

On the other hand, Vaujour and the police establishment shared the military’s belief that swift, coercive action might restore the situation. In an environment dominated by anti-colonial agitation in Tunisia and Morocco, and pan-Arab propaganda

⁵²³ Ibid., Soustelle, pp. 4.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., Horne, pp. 100.

⁵²⁵ Maria Romo, “Le gouvernement de Mendès-France et le maintien de l’ordre en Algérie en novembre 1954” in Jean Charles-Jauffret et Maurice Vaïsse (ed.), *Militaires et guérilla dans la guerre d’Algérie* (Vincennes: Éditions Complexe, 2001), pp. 436.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., Vaujour, pp. 219.

emanating from Cairo, Vaujour shared the prevailing belief closure of the borders and a round up of known radical leaders might head off a general rebellion. Acting on a tip by a previously reliable informer,⁵²⁷ Vaujour led Operation *Oranges Amères* to arrest and interrogate over 2,000 members of the leading radical Algerian Party, Messali Hadj's M.T.L.D. The French then subjected the suspects to intensive interrogation and torture.⁵²⁸ What seemed at the time a prompt response on the sponsors of the revolt turned out to be a major blunder. By rounding up the "usual suspects" the French police not only missed an opportunity to apprehend the real leaders but inadvertently fueled support among the M.T.L.D. membership for the F.L.N. splinter faction.⁵²⁹

Military Response: Show of Force and Traditional Repression

The military responded to the nascent rebellion with aggressive shows of force and large scale, cordon and search operations. Acting under the assumption that the uprisings were local in scope and traditional in origin,⁵³⁰ General Cherrière mounted a series of conventional, military sweeps and searches to extinguish the rebellion in the Aurès and Kablyia regions. The strategy rested on the assumption that muscular demonstrations of force could accomplish two objectives simultaneously: the capture or destruction of the rebel bands and the dissuasion of potential Muslim supporters.⁵³¹

Drawing inspiration from past French successes in suppressing uprisings in Algeria and

⁵²⁷ Ibid., Vaujour, pp. 336.

⁵²⁸ Alf Andrew Heggoy, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Algeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 83.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., Heggoy, pp. 83.

⁵³⁰ Général de C.A. Cherrière (C.R.), "Les debuts de l'insurrection algérienne (Novembre 1954 a fin Juin 1955)," *Revue de Defense Nationale* (décembre 1956), pp. 1451-1452, 1455.

⁵³¹ Ibid., Jean-Charles Jauffret, *La Guerre d'Algérie par les Document, Les portes de la guerre*, pp. 843.

Morocco, Cherrière was confident that prompt and visible military response was the most effective response to the Algerian troubles.

The results of the first winter's campaigns were disappointing. Though the French mounted numerous large scale sweeps and searches, and had some important successes in killing or capturing rebels bands, they failed to stem rebellion. Even at this early stage, unsatisfying results produced split interpretations. Civilian observers highlighted the intrinsic flaws in Cherrière's strategy – the ineffectiveness of large unit operations and the irritation of Muslim populations. In a similar vein, some officers promoted alternative strategies based on small unit counter-guerilla operations or the defense of Muslim populations. These views remained in the minority in the spring of 1955; military leaders generally pushed for rapid reinforcement, improved tactical mobility and the removal of cumbersome legal restrictions. If the civilian leadership was inclined to explore alternative strategies, the first recourse of the military was an escalation of means and the refinement of existing procedures.⁵³²

The local command's response was shaped by four broad forces: overall French military policy, the local command's evaluation of the threat, prevailing causal beliefs about the suppression of rebellion, and the assets available. European concerns dominated French military policy in November and December 1954. Records of the meetings of the November 18, 1954 show a French military establishment squarely focused on European rearmament and only peripherally aware of the significance of the Algerian rebellion.⁵³³ In a meeting held a full two months after the All Saints uprising, the only mention of Algeria was a passing reference to North African manning levels in a

⁵³² Ibid., Jauffret, *La Guerre d'Algérie par les Document*, Tome 2, pp. 672-681.

⁵³³ Ibid., Jauffret, *La Guerre d'Algérie par les Document*, Tome 2, pp. 672-676.

longer series of force allocation across the French empire. While the government and the General staff dispatched ten battalions of reinforcements (~7,000 troops) in the immediate aftermath, contemporary records show that few leaders appreciated the scale of the rebellion. Instead, French military leaders were primarily concerned with their ability to claw back these reinforcements at the earliest possible date.⁵³⁴ As a result, few steps were taken to reorient French military policy or resource allocation, and the national military response remained provisional in scale and intent.

Cherrière was confident that the uprising was traditional in origin and motivation and limited in scale and scope. Writing in 1956, he explained his initial impression of the threat:

The insurrection was launched on the night of All Saints' Day; the immediate results led us to believe that we faced a tribal uprising analogous to those which marked our [colonial] history in North Africa; we therefore assumed that it was sufficient for the army to reduce the dissident tribes, which were very localized, fielded very weak numbers of effectives, and lacked any great store of foreign materiel, and for the police to maintain order elsewhere. It was on this basis that we pursued the restoration of order in the winter of 1954-1955.⁵³⁵

As Cherrière noted, the division of labor between the police and the army appeared straightforward, with the police maintaining order in stable areas and the military focusing on the hotspots of the Aurès and Kabylia. Though Cherrière and others asserted that “the direct impulsion [for the rebellion] came from Cairo,”⁵³⁶ they believed that tighter border security and a traditional military response in the Aurès and Kabylia could together break the rebels and bring the Muslim populations back into the fold.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., Jauffret, “L’Armée et l’Algérie en 1954”, pp. 23.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., Cherrière, “Les debuts de l’insurrection Algérienne,” pp. 1451-1452.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., Cherrière, “Les debuts de l’insurrection Algérienne,” pp. 1451.

While the Algerian garrison had 20,000-30,000 below average postwar levels,⁵³⁷ the French command nevertheless had ten times the number of troops Leclerc had had in the opening stages of the reconquest of Indochina. The majority of the 50,000-60,000 troops⁵³⁸ were restricted to static roles. The theater reserve available for mobile operations was initially quite small, numbering somewhere between 6,000 and 20,000. While military leaders would later point to manpower shortfalls as a major factor in early FLN success, these were offset by the narrow geographical focus of the early French operations. In the first winter of the rebellion, Cherrière focused his mobile reserves first in the Aurès and then in the Kabylia. Two months after the first attacks, the number of French troops had risen to 81,145; by June of that year, it had climbed to 100,000.⁵³⁹ Arrayed against an FLN force numbering in the high hundreds or low thousands, the French theater reserve dwarfed its opponents in the first year of the war.

Limited mobility and inadequate intelligence were far more formidable obstacles to French effectiveness in the first year of the war. French formations were organized and equipped for conventional combat in Europe and relied on wheeled and tracked vehicles for mobility. The mountainous terrain and primitive road network of the Aurès and Kabylia greatly limited the practical mobility of these units. To their credit, the French command had attempted in the months before the rebellion to develop new formations capable of operating in difficult terrain. One such formation, the so-called Blizzard battalion, stripped the heavy vehicles and staff sections out of the standard

⁵³⁷ Paul et Marie-Catherine Villatoux, *La République et son armée face au "péril subversif": Guerre et action psychologiques 1945-1960* (Paris: Les Indes Savanates, 2005), pp. 336.

⁵³⁸ Alban Mahieu, "Les effectifs de l'armée française en Algérie" in *ibid.*, Jauffret, Vaïsse, *Militaires et guerillas dans la guerre d'Algérie*, pp. 59; *ibid.*, Horne, pp. 96; *ibid.*, Heggoy, pp. 79.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, Villatoux, pp. 337; *ibid.*, Mahieu, pp. 39.

battalions to form more mobile light infantry formations.⁵⁴⁰ In the summer of 1954, Cherrière's predecessor, General Callies, advanced a similar idea, substituting mules for trucks, and adding additional intelligence assets. In both cases, the French command recognized the need to drop weight and add rough terrain mobility in order to prosecute the war on rebel terms.⁵⁴¹

Cherrière's reliance on show of force tactics and large scale cordon and search stemmed from his belief in the proven formulas of colonial policing. For more than a century, French commanders in North Africa had shown that a strategy of "punish and pardon" could restore French authority. This was the apparent lesson of Sétif, and the rationale behind the deterrent operations at Nemours-Oujda in October 1953.

What "show of force" meant in practice was the execution of cordon and search operations involving thousands of troops. The French staged over twenty such operations in the winter of 1954-1955, starting in the Aurès region and shifting to the Kabylie in the later phases.⁵⁴² Operation Ichmoul III, launched on November 26, 1954 in the Aurès region, was representative of Cherrière's approach:

Goals of the Operation:

- 1) Penetrate in force into the interior of the Zone of Douar ICHMOUL and by our presence accelerate the rallying movement that has taken root there.
- 2) Comb the region notably the populated areas and recover arms and war materiel cached in this zone.
- 3) In the case of signs of hostility, proceed with the destruction of the adversary and his installations.

The French employed a force of six infantry battalions, three armored cavalry squadrons, two tank destroyer platoons, and five artillery batteries to surround the village and then search it in detail. Over the course of two days, the French seized twelve weapons, 400

⁵⁴⁰ Jean-Charles Jauffret, *Soldats en Algérie 1954-1962: Expériences contrastées des hommes de contingent* (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2000), pp. 82-85.

⁵⁴¹ General Callies, "Note de service: Groupes légers," Alger, 12 juin 1954, in Ibid., Jauffret, *La Guerre d'Algérie par les Documents*, Tome 2, pp. 597-598.

⁵⁴² Ibid., Jauffret, "L'Armée et l'Algérie en 1954", pp. 24.

rounds of ammunition, fifteen kilograms of explosives, and detained 51 suspects of whom 47 were eventually released.⁵⁴³

These encirclement operations ran up against the same obstacles they had in Indochina. The scale of the operations made it difficult to achieve surprise and the rebels often fled before a cordon could be put in place. During the search phase, locals were reluctant to denounce the rebels for fear of retaliation. In the hours of darkness, rebels found it relatively easy to slip through even the tightest cordon on foot. Consequently, the psychological impact was often the opposite of what the command had intended. Far from impressing the locals with the power and effectiveness of the state, the operations tended to highlight the relative ignorance of the authorities. Unable to identify the rebels, the authorities detained large numbers of males only to release them shortly thereafter for lack of evidence. The act of “combing” villages alienated the inhabitants without seriously damaging the rebels or increasing confidence in the staying power of the government.

These large, motorized operations tended to overshadow two alternative strands of thinking within the French command. Colonel Ducournau, commander of the 18th airborne regiment, broke his battalions into smaller dismounted teams to pursue the guerillas on foot in mountainous terrain – an approach he termed “nomadisation.”⁵⁴⁴ Ducournau’s methods delivered the only clear success of the early campaign when one of his units trapped and then destroyed a major rebel band, killing Belkacem Grine, the

⁵⁴³ “Journal de Marché du G.A.P. 1, Mois de Novembre,” in Jauffret, *La Guerre d’Algérie par les Document, Les portes de la guerre*, pp. 859.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., Jauffret, *La Guerre d’Algérie par les Document, Tome 2*, pp. 861, 881 on 11^e Choc’s use of similar light tactics in Kabylie; same mix of night combat, ambush, nomadisation, companies broken into platoon and squad sized elements (T2, 881)

longtime bandit king of the Aurès.⁵⁴⁵ Though Ducournau took a radically different approach to counter-guerilla operations, he shared many of Cherrière's Model 1 assumptions. Both men shared the belief that the use of force against the rebel bands would break the back of the rebellion.

General Spillman, by contrast, advocated a Model 2 response. Arguing that simple pursuit of the rebels was insufficient, Spillmann advocated the construction of permanent, fortified camps within the rebel strongholds and the restoration of positive contact with the local population.⁵⁴⁶ Drawing on the time honored strategies of Lyautey and Gallieni, Spillmann argued that a mix of aggressive patrolling and constructive social and economic interaction with the inhabitants were the key. Unlike his superiors, Spillmann saw the All Saints' uprisings as a more modern and more organized challenge to French authority in Algeria. In Spillmann's opinion, the seriousness of the rebellion and its links to the changing social and economic situation of the Muslim population justified a deeper and more prolonged engagement with the rural population. Neither the metropolitan General Staff, nor General Cherrière shared Spillmann's pessimistic outlook and balked at his proposed long term investment in population control.

Though Ducournau and Spillmann offered cogent alternatives to the show of force strategy, neither strategy took center stage in the first winter and spring of the rebellion. Even when show of force failed to deliver decisive results, senior commanders preferred escalation and refinement of a more extensive strategic search. Ironically, both alternatives would reemerge later in the war; the SAS initiatives by Jacques Soustelle and

⁵⁴⁵ "Rapport du Capitaine B...Commandant la Section de Gendarmerie de BATNA sur l'activité des hors-la-loi dans les Aurès pendant la quinzaine écoulée," in Jauffret, *La Guerre d'Algérie par les Documents*, Tome 2, pp. 849-851.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., Villatoux, pp. 338.

General Parlange echoed Spillmann's emphasis on population control, while the *commandos de chasse* groups of the 1959-1961 owed much to Ducournau's ideas.

The First Balance Sheet: Winter 1954-1955

The military and police crackdown produced significant but not decisive results. Military operations in the Aurès and Kabylia netted a number of insurgents but failed to crush the rebellion in its early stages. The police round up of large numbers of Algerian nationalists disrupted resistance in the short term, at the cost of swinging additional support to the FLN. Perceptions of progress varied considerably across the organs of the French state. The military and police were more optimistic, pointing to the elimination of key rebel leaders and the disruption of the Algerian radical parties. While they acknowledged the frustrations of the first three months of the rebellion, they generally explained the failure to crush the rebellion in terms of inadequate resources, limited intelligence, and excessive legal restrictions. If the results had been less than spectacular, they were regarded as proof of important and cumulative progress towards the restoration of order.

The political authorities in France were far less impressed by the results and less sanguine about the future. Though Mendès-France and Mitterrand had set a mixed policy of reform and selective repression, French strategy had been dominated by blunt and generally ineffective repression. Mitterrand's fears of overreaction were born out, and it was the general dissatisfaction that led to the appointment of Jacques Soustelle as Governor-General in February 1955. More important, the French military and political authorities emerged from the first winter with divergent interpretations of what remained to be done. The military called for material and procedural escalation of the military campaign. A liberal government made a bid to introduce political strategy and reform into the campaign strategy.

Military Interpretations of Early Performance

The military authorities in Algeria were generally optimistic about the results of the early campaign. While they had not crushed the F.L.N. in its entirety, they considered the accomplishments of the winter – rebels killed and captured, weapons confiscated – proof of an essentially sound strategy. They attributed the incomplete nature of their success to inadequate manpower, onerous legal restrictions, and inadequate support by the local civil administration. Since all three of these obstacles could be overcome provided sufficient government commitment, General Cherrière and the high command saw the rebellion as eminently soluble. While they decried the lack of political support, they made it clear that politics ought to play a supporting rather than leading role in the suppression of the insurrection.

The tangible, military results appeared to favor the French. Though the campaign in the Aurès and Kabylie had absorbed ever larger numbers of French reinforcements, the tactical engagements had been decidedly one sided with the French inflicting between three to four times the losses they suffered.⁵⁴⁷ By sheer weight of numbers, the French forces had dealt hard blows to the small rebel movement. The F.L.N., which had started the rebellion with fewer than 1,000 men under arms,⁵⁴⁸ even the modest losses the first three months brought the movement to its nadir by the end of the first winter. More important, the French had killed or captured several leaders of the armed movement,

⁵⁴⁷ The loss ratio for the first three months of the rebellion, measured in terms of FLN and French forces killed in action, was 3.59 (133 FLN killed, 37 French troops). The data are drawn from Guy Pervillé, *Pour une Histoire de la Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Picard, 2002), pp. 176. Primary documents relate a similar story for the first two months: 76 rebels killed, 254 captured, 287 military weapons and 494 hunting weapons confiscated (Source: Jauffret, *La Guerre d'Algérie par les Documents, Tome 2*, pp. 901).

⁵⁴⁸ Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire Intérieure du FLN (1954-1962)* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), pp. 278.

notably Belkacem Grine and Ben Boulaid.⁵⁴⁹ A General Staff summary dated January 24, 1955, captured the qualified optimism of the military establishment:

The measures undertaken and the effective action of the security forces nevertheless made possible the neutralization of the principal armed bands and rendered harmless an important number of terrorists.⁵⁵⁰

On the other hand, the FLN had not collapsed. In spite of a series of small victories, and the growing volume of troops in the Aurès and Kabylia, the rebels had weathered the storm. Though the rebels had yet to spread far beyond their initial strongholds or make an impression on the larger Muslim population,⁵⁵¹ the French lacked the means to maintain a permanent presence throughout the areas, and their preference for large scale operations left few assets to hold cleared areas. Consequently, by the end of the winter, French attrition had done little to restore effective control over the terrain or population of the two FLN strongholds. The psychological impact of the operations was just as difficult to gauge. The countryside had not risen in open support of the rebels, but the repeated and heavy handed use of French troops had tended to alienate the local population rather than encourage them. Even Cherrière, who had confidently spoken of the positive “psychological shock” of large scale maneuvers, had begun to lament the growing gap between Muslims and Europeans.⁵⁵²

The unsatisfying outcome of the winter’s campaign did not diminish Cherrière’s belief in a Model 1 solution. In a private conversation with General Salan on February

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., Vaujour, pp. 419-420.

⁵⁵⁰ “Carton n° 506, non coté EMA 2^e Bureau, 24 Janvier 1955, Paris” in Jauffret, *La Guerre d’Algérie par les Documents*, Tome 2, pp. 900.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., Meynier, pp. 279.

⁵⁵² General Cherrière, “Message No 1.166/2, General Commandant 10^e R.M. Alger à M. Le Secrétaire d’État à la Guerre, Situation en Alger, 28 Décembre 1954,” in Jauffret, *La Guerre d’Algérie par les Documents*, Tome 2, pp. 738.

11, 1955, Cherrière explained his belief that swift, violent action was the only way to snuff out the rebellion:

We must react brutally. The adversary, who is driven by a need to kill, to make blood flow, even among his own countrymen, women and children, must be brought to reason. We saw this clearly at the time of the massacres at Guelma and Sétif in 1945. General Duval threw in everything he had and he crushed the rebellion. We must do the same today if we want to avoid a long war of the type we have just come to know in Indochina.

Still in Salan's presence, Cherrière confronted the Army Chief of Staff, General Blanc, demanding immediate reinforcements:

When will I see professional troops returning from Indochina? I need mobile troops in order to inundate the countryside very quickly, if not the internal fight will assume considerable dimensions and the subversive war that will ensue will be difficult if not impossible to overcome. I have forwarded you a list of the reinforcements I need. I need 80 battalions to protect the population and the vital installations. It is true that I have started to receive units but you must do it quickly.⁵⁵³

Cherrière's answer to the spread of the rebellion was clear. Rapid and brutal action by a larger and more mobile French army could repeat Duval's miracle at Sétif. In his view, ruthlessness and manpower were the missing ingredients in an otherwise sound strategy.

In an article published in the *Revue de Défense Nationale* in December 1956,

Cherrière returned to this theme of inadequate government support:

Although the army did not obtain the authorization to react quickly and forcefully in the two *douars* of the Aurès at the start of the rebellion, and in spite of the limits put on the use of air support, November and December 1954 saw our troops, progressively reinforced by the metropole, reoccupy [first] the Aurès, then the Grand Kabylie, after having destroyed several [rebel] bands and dispersing or driving to ground the others.⁵⁵⁴

Cherrière then spelled out a less ambitious measure of military success, one which in which the military guaranteed freedom of movement and the civilian government assumed responsibility for the elimination of the FLN:

The army nevertheless made clear that this reoccupation only permitted [our forces] to circulate everywhere more or less with impunity, and it underlined that the rebels of All Saints' and their armament remained almost intact; only political action and the intervention of the police and courts,

⁵⁵³ Raoul Salan, *Mémoires: Fin d'un empire, Algérie française, 1^{er} novembre 1954- 6 juin 1958* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1972), pp. 18.

⁵⁵⁴ Général Cherrière, "Les débuts de l'insurrection algérienne (Novembre 1954 à fin Juin 1955), *Revue de Défense Nationale*, December 1956, pp. 1460.

brought to bear with the support or under the cover of our [military] forces, can henceforth crush the resistance.⁵⁵⁵

In hindsight at least, Cherrière acknowledged the importance of integrating political and military efforts.⁵⁵⁶ Like General Valluy in Indochina in 1947, Cherrière reacted to the failure of his initial offensives by shifting the responsibility for the residual problems of popular resistance to the civilian leadership. While Cherrière was eager to transfer responsibility, he was adamant that the military continue to lead the counterinsurgency campaign. The clearly subordinate function of political leaders was to provide resources and to “prepare, accompany, and exploit the battles of the army.”⁵⁵⁷

What Cherrière and most other French officers strongly resisted was the imposition of any restrictions on the use of force. The appropriate role for politicians was to resolve the tiresome problem of native support for the rebellion, not to tie the hands of military leaders diligently engaged in the systematic destruction of the enemy armed forces and support base. When political and military considerations came into conflict, as on the issues of collective responsibility, the use of firepower, population resettlement and torture, military leaders categorically treated political concerns as subordinate to the exigencies of military action.

Political Interpretations of Performance

The political authorities in Paris greeted the mixed results with mounting concern. The failure of Cherrière’s suppression campaigns, and the clear military skew of French actions, raised the possibility that the rebellion might begin to grow and prey on Muslim

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., Cherrière, pp. 1460.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., Cherrière, pp. 1453.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., Cherrière, pp. 1458.

resentment of French rule and economic depression. Periodic visits by civilian observers did little to allay these fears. According to Pierre Nicoläy, a senior Mitterrand aide dispatched to the Aurès in the first weeks of the rebellion, there were two kinds of military leaders in Algeria: “those who think everything is going well, and those who muse about napalm.”⁵⁵⁸

Jacques Soustelle, the new Governor-General dispatched to Algeria in February 1955, considered the French military performance in the first winter to be singularly ineffective. In his subsequent observations, he emphasized the mismatch between French equipment and strategy and the challenge of guerilla warfare:

Vigorously prosecuted at the outset, the [military] action tended to thicken and slow by conforming to the inappropriate mold of “grand operations” which they had had the poor taste to give such bawdy names as “Violette” and “Veronique.” It goes without saying that that several battalions assembled in a great fracas to encircle and then comb through a *djebel* find no one there, or perhaps some mocking *fellaghas* [rebels], who with their rifles stored in a safe place, lead their horses to graze among the [rocks]. Our army striving, under the hold of “atlanticist” ideas, to prepare for an ultra-modern war, had completely forgotten her mission, in my eyes primordial, of presence and sovereignty in Africa. Units prepared for combat in Europe, with sophisticated equipment, are unsuitable to employ in guerilla warfare in the mountains of Constantinois. Too heavy and too loud, tied to the roads by their jeeps and their trucks, they are the easy prey of insurgents who climb the pitons, spring their ambushes and then disperse. Our forces, on the other hand, were too few in the Aurès to reassure the populations there and convince them of our will to remain in Algeria; the net that they threw over such difficult terrain had far too loose a mesh, and more than one *douar* that requested our protection against the incursion of the rebels, seeing their demands still unsatisfied, had to compromise with the rebels.⁵⁵⁹

More significant, the military’s general distrust for the population had made the restoration of authority far more difficult:

It is salutary, certainly, to be suspicious in troubled times, but a generalized mistrust defeats its own purpose. By disarming everyone, we cannot train anyone. It might have been more judicious to distinguish among the notables and the clans who could bring us their support, and to treat them as allies by giving them the necessary means.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁸ Maria Romo, “Le gouvernement Mendès France et le maintien de l’ordre en Algérie en novembre 1954,” in Jauffret, Vaisse, *Militaries et guérilla dans la guerre d’Algérie*, pp. 435.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., Soustelle, pp. 27.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., Soustelle, pp. 28.

Jean Vaujour, the chief of the Security Services, shared Soustelle's bleak appraisal of French authority. In his initial report to Soustelle in February 1955, Vaujour highlighted the tenuous state of the Aurès and advocated something like Spillmann's idea of a dense network of units and outposts designed to reassure the population and disrupt the F.L.N..⁵⁶¹ While he supported reinforcement of the army and police, Vaujour clearly underlined the far greater importance of political measures in restoring stability:

For Algeria, it is important to keep in mind the spirit of demographic disequilibrium that exists between the two ethnic groups of the population, and to understand that it is impossible keep 9/10 of this population in a state of inferior status and entitlement with respect to the other fraction which runs the practical affairs of the country. In fact, far more than military solutions, it is political solutions, of which the essential arguments have a social and economic foundation, which can resolve the that confront the destiny of Algeria today.⁵⁶²

While Vaujour, like Cherrière, highlighted the importance of politics, his definition of politics was almost entirely different. For Cherrière the political solution was for the French state to provide unlimited resources and remove the legal impediments to military action. For Vaujour, the political solution was prompt and radical political and economic reform on behalf of a restive Muslim population. The almost antithetical renderings of politics by civilian and military leaders foreshadowed later and more serious clashes over how to the restoration of French authority.

In short, metropolitan leaders expressed serious reservations about the efficacy of the initial response, the strategies pursued and the political byproducts of "limited repression." While sympathetic to the military's complaints about manpower and unwieldy judicial procedures, civilians emphasized the importance of a mixed policy incorporating constructive as well as destructive elements. The French command, for its

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., Vaujour, pp. 414.

⁵⁶² Ibid., Vaujour, pp. 415.

part, emphasized the centrality of manpower and expanded autonomy. These disagreements set the stage for two divergent strategies of the second phase.

Phase 2: The Liberal Moment and the Return to Escalation

By the end of the winter of 1954-1955, the unsatisfying results of the French campaign prompted the Prime Minister to recall Governor-General Léonard. The appointment of Jacques Soustelle signaled the metropolitan government's determination to impose civilian priorities on French counterinsurgency strategy. In his brief tenure as Governor General, Soustelle developed the only coherent, early war Model 3 alternative to the military's preferred Model 1 and Model 2 strategies. His influence was both proscriptive and prescriptive. He sought to limit the excesses of the security forces while restoring French authority through administrative, political and economic reform.

Soustelle's policy of liberal "integration" met with strong resistance from multiple parties. The military and local police resisted his efforts to impose restrictions on the escalating use of force. By end of his tenure, Soustelle's civilian reform agenda and the military response to the rebellion had split once again with the military prosecuting the campaign as they saw fit. European settlers were suspicious of attempts to force political reforms that would elevate the status of Muslim Algerians at their expense. The F.L.N. rebels, fearful that Soustelle's progressive policies might capture Muslim attention, responded by taking the war to European non-combatants. The combined resistance of the French military, local notables, and the rebels vitiated Soustelle plans. While elements of his program, notably the S.A.S., survived his tenure, Soustelle's

governorship was the high water mark of civilian participation in French counterinsurgency strategy.

Shortly after his arrival in February 1955, Soustelle made a tour of the deeply unsettled Aurès region. Based on his observations there, Soustelle argued that the French faced at least five major problems. The first was the misery of the rural Muslim population. The revolt had erupted in a social environment dominated by unemployment, subsistence agriculture and deep economic and social discontent.⁵⁶³ Second, the French administrative presence in the Aurès was practically non-existent. Despite the best efforts of a handful of French civil administrators, there had been little or no formal contact between the French government and the Muslim population in the postwar period. In his words, “The administration floated like a rudderless raft on the surface of a deep sea whose depths it could scarcely plumb.”⁵⁶⁴ Third, the initial military response to the rebellion had been almost entirely ineffective. Far from crushing the rebellion or cowing the population, General Cherrière’s “grandes opérations” had demonstrated the maladaptation, numerical weakness and lack of staying power of the French military.⁵⁶⁵ Fourth, the reflexive police crackdown on the full spectrum of Algerian nationalist groups had increased support for the armed resistance.⁵⁶⁶ Finally, the local government lacked the special powers necessary to address the revolt. While the settlers and military saw martial law as the answer, Soustelle considered the grant of more limited, emergency powers essential to the restoration of order.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶³ Soustelle, pp. 24.

⁵⁶⁴ Soustelle, pp. 16.

⁵⁶⁵ Soustelle, pp. 27; *ibid.*, Droz, Lever, pp. 71.

⁵⁶⁶ Soustelle, pp. 28.

⁵⁶⁷ Soustelle, pp. 29.

Convinced that the rebellion was more serious than either the military or the metropolitan government appreciated, Soustelle weighed a series of imperfect policy options. The policy of assimilation or *francisation* that had dominated the scene prior to 1954 had failed, and the metropolitan government had categorically rejected the other extreme of independence.⁵⁶⁸ That left two intermediate options: federalism and integration. Soustelle considered federalism something of a political mirage; France lacked the institutions to support a federal devolution of power, and a premature move in this direction would inevitably lead to Algerian secession.⁵⁶⁹ As a result, Soustelle embraced the policy of integration. According to Soustelle, integration had three pillars: the recognition of the distinctive character and traditions of Algeria, a commitment to rapid social and economic modernization, and an immediate move towards real political equality on the individual and communal level.⁵⁷⁰

The next step was to develop a strategy to implement the policy of integration. In practical terms, Soustelle's strategy had three elements. First, he insisted on the rapid implementation of the stalled 1947 reforms. The abolition of *communes mixtes* and the drive to increase Muslim participation in Algerian public administration⁵⁷¹ were the tangible expressions of Soustelle's commitment to accelerated political reform. He also promised economic and social modernization. Shortly after his arrival, the Governor-General announced a doubling of public investment in Algeria and strongly suggested that these funds would be targeted at the economically depressed, Muslim interior.⁵⁷² In addition to public works, Soustelle envisioned major initiatives in public education,

⁵⁶⁸ Droz, Lever, pp. 71.

⁵⁶⁹ Soustelle, pp. 92-93.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., Soustelle, pp. 93.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., Soustelle, pp. 84, 110.

⁵⁷² Ibid., Droz, Lever, pp. 68-69.

sanitation, and agricultural development. Only through by improving the economic and social condition of the Muslim majority could the French hope to stem the growth of support for the F.L.N..

Soustelle also sought to recast the security element of the counterinsurgency campaign. Recognizing that the thrust of the F.L.N. movement was political rather than military,⁵⁷³ Soustelle advocated a strategy of pacification and local security in place of the offensive operations of the first winter. Whereas many military leaders were calling for the removal legal and practical restrictions on military action, Soustelle advocated a revised, legal framework. Fearful that martial law would mean the end of civilian control, he argued that temporary, emergency powers could give the authorities necessary tools without endangering his policy of integration. He was, on the other hand, acutely aware of the dangers of blind or unlimited repression.⁵⁷⁴ In his instructions to senior military commanders and his public addresses to the Algerian Assembly, Soustelle made clear that they could not afford to lose sight of their goal of restoring a just and legal order.

The third and least visible element of Soustelle's strategy was his contact with leading Algerian nationalists. In a clear break with the initial French crackdown on the M.T.L.D. and other nationalists, Soustelle and his associates put out feelers to the leading figures, including Ferhat Abbas and Messali Hadj.⁵⁷⁵ These forays included contacts between Commandant Monteil, one of Soustelle's closest advisors, and the captured F.L.N. leader, Ben Boulaid. These contacts demonstrated Soustelle's belief that integration depended on the ability to identify and cultivate moderate, Muslim

⁵⁷³ Ibid., Soustelle, pp. 215.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., Soustelle, pp. 48-49, 125.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., Clayton, pp. 117.

nationalists. On a more indirect level, these discussions gave Soustelle's circle more evidence of the political costs of the initial French response. Discussions with detained nationalist leaders revealed that the military and police actions had increased support for the rebellion both in political circles and amidst the general population.⁵⁷⁶ Soustelle's efforts to enlist the active and consensual support of Muslim leaders put him at odds with the military and *pieds noirs*; the former still saw military operations as the centerpiece of the campaign, and suspected that negotiation of any kind was a prelude to capitulation. The *pieds noirs* correctly feared that any real political reform would jeopardize their outsized political and economic standing.

Filling the void: The S.A.S., Administration, and Pacification

The *sections administratives spécialisées* or S.A.S. were the most important operational innovation of the Soustelle period and a concrete expression of Soustelle's belief in mixed pacification strategies. By placing small teams of military administrators in the remote regions of the interior, and pursuing a combination of civic action and local self-defense, Soustelle hoped that the French authorities could reassert their authority and address the underlying causes of the rebellion. While Soustelle's Model 3 policies did not survive his departure, the S.A.S. system remained at the core of French pacification efforts from its introduction in 1955 through the end of French rule in 1962.

The S.A.S. was Soustelle's answer to the administrative void in the Muslim heartland.⁵⁷⁷ If the abandonment of the Muslim interior between 1945 and 1954 had

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., Horne, pp. 110.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., Soustelle, pp. 84-85.

precipitated the outbreak of violent resistance,⁵⁷⁸ then the introduction of additional administrators might provide a foundation for the reintroduction of French civil authority in those regions. Soustelle and the military leadership recognized that it would be practically impossible to push additional civil administrators into the affected regions in the context of violent rebellion.⁵⁷⁹ Consequently, Soustelle introduced the idea of using specially trained military officers to enforce civil administration and restore order.

The S.A.S. initiative was an idea of mixed parentage. In structure, it was a descendant of the 19th century *bureaux arabes* (B.A.)⁵⁸⁰ and the more recent *Affaires indigènes* (A.I.)⁵⁸¹ system of 20th century French Morocco. In both cases, the French had used small teams of specially trained military officers to oversee civil and military administration in unsettled regions of French North Africa. General Parlange, the architect of the first S.A.S. experiments in the Aurès in 1955, was a veteran of the Moroccan *Affaires indigènes*, as were many of the initial cadres of the Algerian S.A.S.⁵⁸²

While the S.A.S. was based on the B.A./A.I. model, two other players exerted powerful influence on its development. The first was the Governor-General himself. As an ethnologist whose academic work in the 1930s had focused on the problems of rural

⁵⁷⁸ Jean-Pierre Peyroulou, "Rétablir et maintenir l'ordre colonial: la police française et les Algériens en Algérie française de 1945 à 1962" in Harbi, Stora, *La Guerre d'Algérie*, pp. 161.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., Frémaux, pp. 55.

⁵⁸⁰ The *bureaux arabes* had been formed in the 1830s to manage French interaction with local notables and tribes in post-conquest Algeria. As such, it had been the linchpin of the French strategy of indirect rule in the territory, and it was only disestablished in the 1870s as French civil administrators assumed many of the B.A.'s functions. For a complete account of the B.A., see Jacques Frémaux, *Les Bureaux Arabes dans L'Algérie de la Conquête* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1993).

⁵⁸¹ The *Affaires indigènes* system had been introduced in Morocco in the first two decades of the 20th century. Like the Algerian *bureaux arabes*, the A.I. performed a dual mission of civil administration/development and security surveillance/pacification in the rural areas (Source: Grégor Mathias, *Les sections administratives spécialisées en Algérie*, pp. 16).

⁵⁸² It was the abrupt end of French administration in Morocco that made possible the transfer of these AI personnel. Without these initial, Arab speaking military cadres, it would have been difficult to sustain the rapid expansion of the S.A.S. network in Algeria (Source: Xavier Dulac, "Les sections administratives spécialisées d'Algérie- S.A.S.," *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 4 (novembre 1959), pp. 128).

development in Mexico, Soustelle was convinced that more effective administration and constructive development might alleviate Muslim suffering and with it the motivation for resistance. Another clear advocate was General Constans, a prominent member of Soustelle's cabinet and an Indochina veteran. Constans saw in the S.A.S. an opportunity to avoid the errors of Indochina and focus the state's attention on the native population.⁵⁸³ S.A.S. cadres might, like the Viet Minh, organize the local population and secure their loyalty. The ready template of the B.A./A.I., the personal influence of A.I. veterans, Soustelle's enthusiasm for constructive rural development, and the Indochina veterans' enthusiasm for population centered strategies, all contributed to the introduction and rapid expansion of the S.A.S..

As in the earlier B.A. and A.I., the S.A.S. had two missions: civil administration and military pacification. The most basic civic function of the S.A.S. teams was to re-establish positive contact with the Muslim population. To accomplish this, the S.A.S. officer was given broad civic powers in his locale. He wielded the power of a judge and could impose fines and limited imprisonment in response to minor infractions.⁵⁸⁴ The S.A.S. leader was also responsible for a range of social and economic development projects. He was the overseer of public works projects, public education initiatives, and rural economic development. As the official spokesman for the French authorities, the S.A.S. commander was also the de facto leader of the local psychological operations campaign.

⁵⁸³ Grégor Mathias, *Les sections administratives spécialisées en Algérie: Entre idéal et réalité (1955-1962)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), pp. 25.

⁵⁸⁴ Jacques Frémaux, "Les SAS (sections administratives spécialisées)," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, No. 208 (Janvier 2003), pp. 58.

The S.A.S. also played a leading role in local self-defense, intelligence gathering, and pacification. The core of each S.A.S. team consisted of one Arabic speaking officer, one non-commissioned officer, and two to three French enlisted men. This team then raised a self-defense force of between 30 and 50 Muslim auxiliaries or *moghanzis*.⁵⁸⁵ The local forces and their French cadre conducted local patrols to limit rebel incursions and boost local security. In their role as local administrators, S.A.S. officers were well placed to gauge popular support for the government and the rebels.⁵⁸⁶ Using their local auxiliaries and ties with local notables, they could identify specific rebel targets for police or military action.

The success of the initial experiments in the Aurès led to a rapid expansion in the program. From its launch in 1955, the number of S.A.S. sections grew to 192 by January 1956 and reached a peak of 700 by the war's end.⁵⁸⁷ Though the command faced countless problems in building a force of Arabic speaking administrators in this short time, the injection of the S.A.S. immediately strengthened the French administrative presence in the interior. Whereas civil administrators in the Aurès and Kabylie in 1954 had been responsible for upwards of 80,000 inhabitants, the average S.A.S. team had responsibility over 12,000 inhabitants: somewhere between a five and seven fold increase in the French administrative presence in the Muslim rural areas.⁵⁸⁸ The introduction of well trained teams focused on civic action and local self-defense rather than large scale offensive action helped temper the regular army's tendency to pursue an offensive military response to resistance.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., Frémaux, pp. 57.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., Mathias, pp. 111; *ibid.*, Frémaux, pp. 59.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., Frémaux, pp. 56.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., Frémaux, pp. 56-57.

The bureaucratic reaction to S.A.S. was mixed. The French military leadership was initially enthusiastic; Generals Cherrière and Spillmann had both lobbied for the transfer of Arabic speaking, A.I. officers with experience in pacification and administration.⁵⁸⁹ Over time, however, the friction between the two groups increased.⁵⁹⁰ Even in the pilot experiments of 1955, General Parlange clashed with Colonel Ducournau over the negative impact of offensive military operations on population security. Ducournau, like most French military leaders, saw the problem of pacification in terms of military pursuit and coercion; Parlange and the S.A.S., by contrast, saw pacification as a long term act of persuasion in which the blunt use of force might upset months of progress.⁵⁹¹ In practical terms, the static S.A.S. team, dependent on the local Muslim population for intelligence and protection, was reluctant to endorse mobile operations that might damage their rapport with the population. Whatever the upshot of a given military operations, the S.A.S. administrator would inherit the results. Like their forbearers in the *bureaux arabes* and A.I., the S.A.S. often developed considerable empathy with the Muslim population, a sentiment seldom shared by the mobile units of the French theater reserve.⁵⁹²

The traditional mistrust of the *Affaires indigènes* on the part of the military regulars lived on. These officers [the A.I. or S.A.S.], by force of circumstances, did not give priority to military action. They were frequently the enemies of the Manichaeism that considered all Muslims who maintained ties with the “rebels” guilty, as if they could do otherwise, and as if it would not be cleverer to use these contacts for the benefit of the French cause, rather than embarking on a course of blind repression.⁵⁹³

The mixed roles of the S.A.S. led them to reject simple categorizations of the population, opting instead to focus on the problem of moving the various segments of the population

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., Mathias, pp. 20.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., Mathias, pp. 148-151.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., Frémaux, pp. 61.

⁵⁹² Ibid., Frémaux, pp. 60, 63.

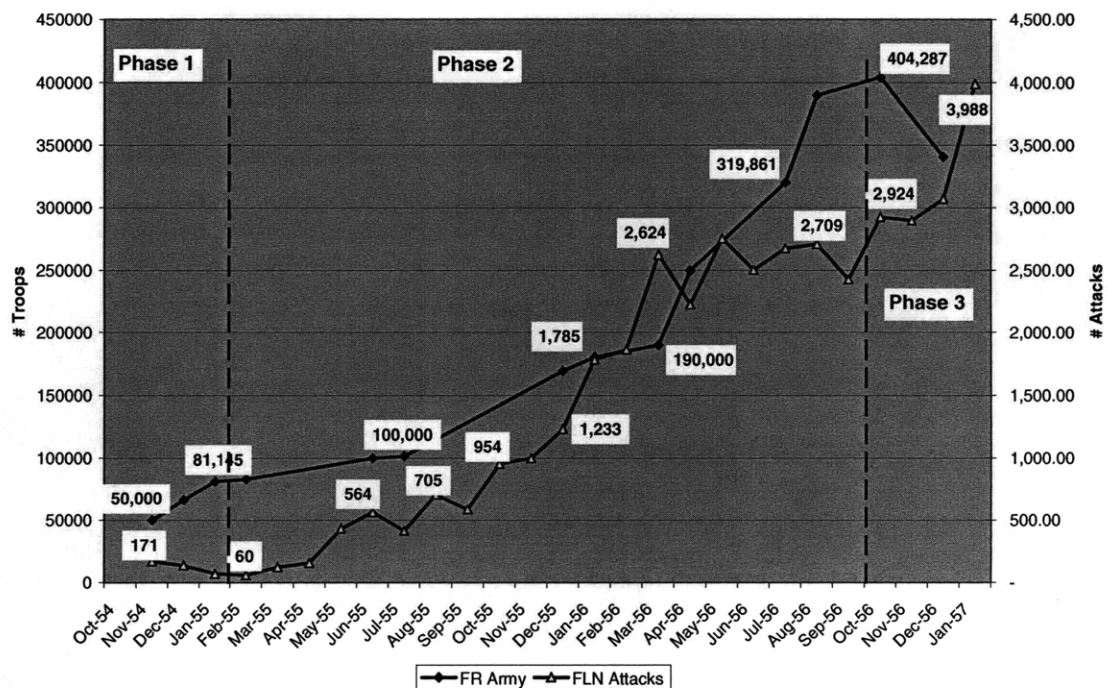
⁵⁹³ Ibid., Frémaux, pp. 62.

from open or passive resistance to active support for the regime. The tension between the S.A.S.'s Model 2 and Model 3 vision of pacification and the regular military's Model 1 focus on pursuit and destruction of guerillas and their supporters was never fully resolved.

Military Response: Deteriorating Stalemate and Model 1 Escalation

While Soustelle and his advisors struggled to introduce political and economic reforms, the military was squarely focused on the widening guerilla war. The failure of Cherrière's campaign did not lead to a first order reappraisal of strategy or an immediate move in the direction of the late Indochina experiments in population control. Instead, the military's response to deteriorating stalemate was to call for escalation, operational refinements, and freedom of action. The metropolitan government's willingness to double the number of troops in Algeria and relax legal restrictions enabled the military to play out this preferred response to counterinsurgency. By the end of Soustelle's tenure, the French military had deployed almost twice the level of troops they had at the peak of the Indochina war but had failed to stop or even slow the spread of the revolt. The failure of simple escalation set the stage for the emergence of the GR school in the third phase of the war.

Phases 1-3: Model 1, Escalation, and Deterioration



By almost any objective measure, the Cherrière initial strategy had failed to suppress or even contain the Algerian revolt. In spite of the scattered tactical successes in the Aurès and Oranais regions, the rebellion had expanded in scope and scale.⁵⁹⁴ By the beginning of 1956, the F.L.N. had expanded its low level terror campaign to cover two thirds of Algeria.⁵⁹⁵ The growth in F.L.N. strength was even more striking; the rebels' armed strength had expanded from less than a thousand dedicated fighters in November 1954 to 6,000 by the end of 1955⁵⁹⁶ and 8,050 by mid-1956.⁵⁹⁷

In spite of the limited effect of the ongoing surge of reinforcements, General Lorillot's first response upon assuming command in July 1955 was to call for more. In a report dated October 14, 1955, Lorillot explained the situation and his proposed remedy:

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., Horne, pp. 151.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., Droz, Lever, pp. 80.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., Droz, Lever, pp. 81.

⁵⁹⁷ David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria (1956-1958)*, RAND MG-478-1 (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1963), pp. 19.

Since the first of October, the western Oranie is the wellspring of the troubles tied to a plan driven by external forces and seeking to extend bit by bit over all of Algeria. Without neglecting the Constantinois region, where an effort has begun to emerge, it is necessary to extinguish the fire on the Algerian border with Morocco before it can develop, and, at the same time, prevent centers of resistance like the one being established on the shores of the Mitidja of Algiers, or the one projected in the Sahara. This situation demands that I my request for reinforcement, numbering thirty battalions in my letter of July 4, be fulfilled.⁵⁹⁸

Though Lorillot focus remained the pursuit of the rebel bands, he endorsed a move away from Cherrière's brand of large scale operations in favor of Ducournau's nomadisation. In a directive dated September 17, 1955, Lorillot argued that, "the only truly profitable form of operations is the nomadisation of unencumbered, light units, operating offensively or lying in wait, and moving primarily at night."⁵⁹⁹

Two aspects of Lorillot's analysis are noteworthy. The first is his emphasis on the role of external sponsorship. Like Cherrière, Lorillot remained fixated on the external origins of the rebellion. The second is his abiding belief that the best hope still lay in reinforcement rather than alternative strategies. Under Cherrière, a more than 100% increase in French troop levels had not slowed the spread of the rebellion or arrested the spiral in violence. Still, Lorillot instinctive response was to expand and refine of the Model 1 strategy rather than explore alternatives.

By the middle of 1956, however, Lorillot had realized that aggressive pursuit alone was at best a partial answer. Desperate for an answer to the spread of violence in rural areas, Lorillot poured ever increasing numbers of conscript units into static defensive roles.⁶⁰⁰ The new *quadrillage* strategy involved a division of labor between a network of static units and the elite, mobile units of the theater reserve. The static units,

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., Salan, pp. 28.

⁵⁹⁹ General Lorillot, "Directive aux généraux commandant les divisions, 17 sept. 1955" as cited in Olivier Hamon, "Chronique du conflit algérien 1954-1962, *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 187 (juin 1992), pp. 37.

⁶⁰⁰ Michel Hardy, Hervé Lemoine, Thierry Saramant, *Pouvoir politique et autorité militaire en Algérie française: Hommes, texts, institutions 1945-1962* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), pp. 59-60.

working with the newly established S.A.S. detachments, were to eradicate local guerilla units and then protect the local populations from new rebel incursions. The units of the general reserve were to respond to larger concentrations of rebel forces along the frontiers or in the remote areas of the interior.⁶⁰¹

The problem, as Cherrière and Lorillot soon realized, was that *quadrillage* was a bottomless pit. Writing to the French Defense Minister in June 1955, General Cherrière identified the inescapable tradeoff between the need to protect the population and furnish mobile units for pursuit:

Territorial defense demands considerable resources in order to simultaneously lay down a sufficient network of static units [*quadrillage*] in the countryside and have at the ready the necessary means of for mobile intervention.⁶⁰²

As military commanders in Indochina had discovered a decade earlier, the number of troops necessary to meet both missions could be enormous. By one French commander's estimate, it would have taken at 400,000 troops to meet the *quadrillage* needs and another 50,000 to equip an effective theater reserve.⁶⁰³ In spite of the low and declining returns on these manpower investments, the high command still clung to the idea that additional troops might save the French cause.

Escalation was not limited to the material dimension. From the beginning, senior military officers had chafed at the legal restrictions on military action in Algeria. The peacetime framework, with its emphasis on individual rights and judicial process, made it difficult for French security forces to detain and punish rebels and their supporters.

French commanders frequently arrested suspected guerillas only to find that they were

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., Galula, pp. 24; Jean-Charles Jauffret, *Soldats en Algérie 1954-1962: Expériences contrastées des hommes de contingent* (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2000), pp. 108.

⁶⁰² General Cherrière, "Lettre du général Cherrière au ministre de la Défense nationale, 22 juin 1955," as cited in Villatoux, *La République et son armée*, pp. 338.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., Galula, pp. 24-25.

released by the authorities a short time later for lack of evidence. Intense lobbying on the part of the military and the settlers led to the passage of emergency powers bill in April 1956.⁶⁰⁴ The emergency powers curtailed a wide range of personal and collective freedoms. The authorities were given the power to control the movement of persons and goods, establish “forbidden zones” in which no residents were permitted to travel, and conduct searches and arrests.⁶⁰⁵

Though the new powers represented a major departure from peacetime law, the use of force by local military commanders and police had long since rendered official regulations moot. Summary justice took a number of forms. At its most benign, it involved the imposition of minor fines or imprisonment on those suspected of active involvement with the guerillas. As one French commander pointed out, the absence of any clear set of guidelines left the local commanders to decide guilt and impose punishment.⁶⁰⁶ When French forces were the victims of F.L.N. ambushes, it became commonplace to punish the closest Muslim community for their assumed complicity. Punishment could vary from heavy fines to the destruction of the village and forced resettlement of its inhabitants.⁶⁰⁷ That these measures contradicted standing civil and military injunctions was irrelevant. Local commanders, operating under their own assumptions about the relationship between force and political behavior, were the real sovereigns in many local areas.

The treatment of captured guerillas was often severe. Though some commanders turned captured fighters over to the civil authorities, mounting frustration with the slow

⁶⁰⁴ Henri Le Mire, *Histoire militaire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1982), pp. 60; *ibid.*, Horne, pp. 116.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, Galula, pp. 25.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, Galula, pp. 87.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Jauffret, *Soldats en Algérie 1954-1962*, pp. 262, 266.

and porous judicial system led many to execute them on the spot. In some cases were the “reflexive actions” of units that had suffered losses at the hands of the rebels.⁶⁰⁸ In other cases, local commanders engaged in a more deliberate triage of captured suspects; those who could be rehabilitated were employed as auxiliaries, while the hard cases were discreetly executed and their bodies dumped in remote areas.⁶⁰⁹ The military high command’s calls for the “pitiless punishment of the rebels,”⁶¹⁰ the ineffectiveness of the judicial system, and the barbarity of the civil war at the local level made extra-judicial individual and collective punishments commonplace.

Exploitation in all its forms was a substitute for more extensive exploration of alternative counterinsurgency strategies. Additional troops and new legal and extralegal means of increasing pressure on the rebels and their supporters led the French command to postpone strategic reappraisal even in its least onerous forms. In an official report dated June 1955, Roger Trinquier, the leader of French *maquis* efforts in Northern Tonkin, expressed his frustration with the failure to incorporate seemingly obvious insights from the war in Indochina:

We are currently fighting in North Africa more or less as we did in Indochina in 1946. Against an adversary who presents the same characteristics, we apply a maladapted instrument of war; we always try to crush the fly with the same pile driver.⁶¹¹

Trinquier was not alone in his frustration with the escalatory response. David Galula, a French officer who had been a military observer in the Chinese and Greek Civil Wars and the Huk rebellion, noted that the manpower costs of *quadrillage* and pursuit were fast approaching the limits of French national resources: “We were apparently caught in a

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., Jauffret, *Soldats en Algérie 1954-1962*, pp. 265.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., Jauffret, *Soldats en Algérie 1954-1962*, pp. 278.

⁶¹⁰ General Allard, March 1955, as cited in Ibid., Jauffret, *Soldats en Algérie 1954-1962*, pp. 259.

⁶¹¹ Roger Trinquier, “Rapport du lieutenant-colonel Trinquier sur l’action menée en Indochine par le Groupement Mixte d’Intervention,” as cited in Villatoux, pp. 338.

vicious circle from which only strategy could save us.”⁶¹² Growing military strength made direct combat with rebels bands possible, but it did little to address the underlying problems of pacification. While the number of military skeptics increased with the flow of experienced units, their influence remained limited so long as the original theory of victory remained plausible. It would take further deterioration and a change in leadership to bring these views to the fore.

The persistence of Model 1 strategies over the first two years of the Algerian had little to do with a shortage of plausible alternatives. A number of heterodox solutions were present from the beginning, and local commanders had stumbled onto many of the building blocks of the late war strategies - *nomadisation*, *quadrillage*, S.A.S., and Muslim auxiliaries (*harkis*). In spite of the promising results of local experiments, and the mounting evidence of the limits of conventional response, the military command proved remarkably resistant to alternative solutions. In the presence of rising manpower, tactical success, and minimal civilian participation, the search for alternatives was indefinitely delayed.

Durcissement and the Death of Integration

Though Soustelle had outlined a policy and assembled the tools to implement it, his vision was to prove short lived. The French military never fully accepted Soustelle's proscriptions on collective responsibility and repression, and *pied noir* leaders were suspicious of his calls for political reform. As Soustelle sought to overcome political and bureaucratic resistance in his own camp, the F.L.N.'s decided to escalate the level of violence by targeting French civilians. The resulting Philippeville massacre, and the

⁶¹² Ibid., Galula, pp. 25.

military repression that followed, sealed the fate of Soustelle's integration policy. Neither the army nor the *colon* population could endorse a policy that granted concessions to a savagely violent Muslim population; Muslim moderates, for their part, could not embrace the authority of a state that meted out blind repression in retaliation for F.L.N. excesses. The F.L.N. had successfully derailed the only pre-1959 French strategy predicated on the consent of the governed. Philippeville marked the beginning of a *durcissement* or hardening of French strategy and policy in Algeria.

While the military had tolerated Soustelle's initiatives in the political sphere, they bridled at his restrictions on the use of force. Soustelle, like Mitterand and Mendès-France, had always emphasized the risks of blind repression. In his standing instructions, Soustelle explained the importance of restraint:

If the repression must be rapid and vigorous with respect to the terrorists, it must at the same time be just, for all errors would alienate who are in fact the victims or witnesses of terror.

Certainly, in action, innocents may be attacked. It is inevitable, for example, that "porters" requisitioned by the rebels and accompanying an armed group might be subjected to the fire of our weapons.

But, outside the context of combat, humanity retakes its rights, and all blind reprisal is formally proscribed... The individuals arrested, whether their culpability is certain or probable, are to be handed over to qualified authorities: police, gendarmerie, civil administrators, military officers of Algerian affairs [S.A.S.].

No one can substitute themselves for these authorities in order to reestablish order or punish the guilty.... Any idea of vengeance is to be dismissed.

Police operations (searches, arrests, transfers, interrogations) must be conducted without brutality. Never hold the crimes of the few against a group. Verifications of identity and various inspections must be performed under the same conditions for all, without racial discrimination.... Every violation of human dignity, every injury, every physical cruelty is rigorously prohibited.⁶¹³

Soustelle's admonitions had little effect on a military convinced of the need for decisive action. Faced with their inability to stamp out the rebellion in its opening stages, the military attacked the remaining legal and procedural restrictions. In a letter to General

⁶¹³ Ibid., Soustelle, pp. 232-233.

Allard dated May 14, 1955, General Cherrière, the senior commander in Algeria, directed his subordinate to ignore Soustelle's standing orders:

I delegate you powers to decide, depending circumstances, employment machine-guns, rockets and bombs, on bands in rebellion zone. Collective responsibility to be vigorously applied. There will be no written instruction given by the Governor.⁶¹⁴

As in Indochina, the military employed collective responsibility under the assumption that it would contribute to pacification. The exercise of force, whether selective or general, would tend to cow local populations into submission and leave the guerillas exposed to betrayal or direct military action.

The settlers and the police were scarcely more supportive of Soustelle's policies. Soustelle's plans for large scale land reform were stymied by the *pied noir* elites who opposed changes on economic and social grounds.⁶¹⁵ The leaders of the *pied noir* community actively resisted political reforms that would weaken their hold on power and extend political equality to the Muslim majority. The elites who had successfully blocked the political reforms of 1947 were unwilling to surrender the same ground in the context of a violent rebellion. The police, largely *pied noir* and military by background,⁶¹⁶ shared the *colons'* political views and the military's sensibilities regarding the use of force. The police generally shared the European population's belief in the basic inferiority of the Muslim population and their prior military training gave the Algerian police to a quasi-military bent.

The Philippeville massacres brought to a head the military, police and settler resistance to integration. The local F.L.N. commander, Zighoud Youssef, desperate to stimulate Muslim support, planned to provoke French overkill by targeting European

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., Horne, pp. 113-114; *ibid.*, Droz, Lever, pp. 74.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., Droz, Lever, pp. 95.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid, Peyroulou, pp. 149.

civilians. In a wave of attacks launched on August 20, 1955, the F.L.N. fighters and local supporters killed 123 people, 71 of whom were European. The vast majority of the European dead came from a mining settlement at El Halia. Whipped up by F.L.N. claims that the Egyptians and the Americans were preparing to land nearby to complete the liberation of Algeria,⁶¹⁷ local Muslim workers helped the guerillas kill and mutilate dozens of men, women and children.

The appalling scenes at El Halia provoked an almost instantaneous wave of military, police and settler retaliation. According to Paul Aussaresses, one of the military commanders on the scene, French troops summarily executed large numbers of guerillas and their suspected collaborators.⁶¹⁸ Estimates of the number of Muslims killed in the wake of the massacre vary considerably; official French reports put the total at 1,273 killed in the military actions while the F.L.N. claimed that some 12,000 had been killed.⁶¹⁹ The military crack down revealed the latent tension between Soustelle's desire to limit collateral damage and the army's insistence on the primacy of military concerns. Writing in 1956, Soustelle described his decision to deny the use of bombing against rebel strongholds in the days after Philippeville:

A dozen *mechtas* [Algerian hamlets] were pinpointed, thanks to prisoner interrogations and the observations of the military, as serving as rebel bases of operations. From a purely military point of view, and in a "normal" war, nothing would have been more justified than to destroy them by bombing them from high altitude. This is what the military leaders pressed me to order, and, within the limits of their technique, they were right. But I had to weigh, in the face of their arguments and the demands of the moment, the fact that these

⁶¹⁷ Général Paul Aussaresses, *Les services spéciaux, Algérie 1955-1957* (Paris: Perrin, 2001), pp. 65.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., Aussaresses, pp. 64-69; Pierre Leulliette, John Edmonds (tr.), *St. Michael and the Dragon: Memoirs of a Paratrooper* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), pp. 149-152.

⁶¹⁹ As in the case of the Sétif massacres, it is hard to establish a clear and unbiased figure for the number of Muslim dead. The official figure of 1,273 is probably on the low end, but the F.L.N. figure may well have been inflated for dramatic effect. Paul Aussaresses, who participated in the post-massacre crack down, put the total number of FLN dead at 500. British historian Anthony Clayton estimates that the total number was probably between two and three thousand. As at Sétif, it is safe to say that the number of Muslim dead was many multiples that of the European dead (Sources: Droz, Lever, pp. 77; General Paul Aussaresses, *Services Spéciaux, Algérie 1955-1957* (Paris: Perrin, 2001), pp. 69; *ibid.*, Le Mire, pp. 34).

enemy bases were not forts but villages where, without a doubt, many innocents lived alongside the guilty. I decided in the end, in spite of the risks that our troops would have to run, to attack the *mechtas* with infantry.⁶²⁰

Soustelle's account of the collision of civilian and military opinion is revealing on two counts. First, he draws a clear distinction between what he terms "normal" war and the campaign in Algeria. Second, he acknowledges the qualified validity of the military's solution. In the context of normal war, the application of firepower would be eminently sensible; in the context, the rules of military cause and political effect were fundamentally different. It was this categorical distinction, and the lack of a parallel distinction in most military circles, that explained the mounting friction between civil and military authorities.

After Philippeville

The Philippeville massacre and the repression that followed spelled the end of liberal integration and the high watermark of civilian policy leadership in Algeria. The idea of ceding political equality had lost any promise in the eyes of the settlers, and even Soustelle had begun to question the wisdom of concession in the face of unrestrained violence. Military and police leaders bent on crushing the rebel bands and their supporters increasingly ignored formal strictures on the use of force. While the constructive elements of Soustelle's mixed strategy remained, the counterinsurgency campaign began to travel on parallel tracks. The military and police, emboldened by the doubling of the number of French troops in Algeria, waged an offensive, military

⁶²⁰ Ibid., Soustelle, pp. 124.

campaign to crush the insurgency. Soustelle and his reformers sought to address the social and economic plight through various relief and development programs.

The already weakened edifice of civilian control received two additional blows in February 1956. Prime Minister Mollet's decision to replace Soustelle with General Catroux, the administrator who had overseen the end of French rule in Morocco, was seen by the settler community as an unmistakable move towards the surrender of *l'Algérie française*. The ensuing demonstrations in Algiers forced Mollet to withdraw Catroux's appointment and install a new candidate, Robert Lacoste. The settlers' success in effectively overturning the metropolitan government's appointment of a Governor General set the precedent for future settler vetoes of central government policy. At the end of February, General Guillaume, the French Chief of the Joint Staff and General Zeller, the Chief of the Army Staff, tendered their resignations in protest over delays in reinforcements to the army in Algeria.⁶²¹ These two shocks, one from the settlers and the other from the military, set a pattern would hold from 1956 to the end of the war. While civilians retained nominal control over strategy and policy, they assumed a junior role in debates dominated by the settlers and military leaders.

Though Lacoste did not repudiate Soustelle's policy of integration,⁶²² the scope and scale of the rebellion, the influx of French military reinforcements, and the extension of new emergency powers made the pull of escalation irresistible. Between Philippeville in August 1955 and the arrival of General Salan in December 1956, the French military under Lorillot made a final attempt to resolve the uprising by force of numbers and ruthlessness. The arrival of increasing numbers of conscripts enabled the local command

⁶²¹ Ibid., Droz, Lever, pp. 95, fn. 1.

⁶²² Lacoste appointed Colonel Ducournau, the father of nomadisation and a Model 1 advocate, his military adviser in the new cabinet (Source: Droz, Lever, pp. 91).

to garrison ever larger swathes of the countryside and to expand the scale and intensity of pursuit operations. The passage of the emergency powers legislation in April 1955 gave the Governor General and his subordinates new and sweeping powers over movement, commerce, assembly, search and detention.⁶²³

On the military front, official guidance encouraged an increasingly ruthless prosecution of the war in the countryside. In a July 1, 1955 directive on “the attitude to adopt vis-à-vis the rebels in Algeria,” General Kœnig the French Minister of Defense, advocated “a military reaction ‘More brutal, more rapid, and more complete.’” Kœnig indicated that all suspects using weapons or seen with weapons in hand were to be shot on the spot and that troops should open fire on all fleeing suspects.⁶²⁴ The day after the emergency powers law was enacted, civilian prefects were formally authorized to delegate their powers to local military authorities.⁶²⁵ With these official sanctions, the military was able to bypass or supplant civil authority in the prosecution of the war.

Phase 3: Algeria as Revolutionary War

By the close of 1956, the failure of French policy and strategy had become clear to most observers. Soustelle’s policy of liberal integration seemed increasingly unreal in the polarized environment of ethnic violence and the military’s return to escalation had been equally ineffective.⁶²⁶ In spite of countless tactical victories over the scattered and

⁶²³ “Loi n° 55-385 du 3 avril 1955 instituant un état d’urgence et en déclarant l’application en Algérie, *Journal officiel* du 7 avril 1955,” pp. 3479-3480 as reproduced in Michel Hardy, Herve Lemine, Thierry Sarmant, *Pouvoir Politique et Autorité Militaire en Algérie française: Hommes, Textes, Institutions 1945-1962* (Paris: Service Historique de l’Armée de Terre, 2002), pp. 147-151.

⁶²⁴ General Kœnig as cited in Raphaëlle Branche, “La torture pendant la guerre d’Algérie” in Mohammed Harbi, Benjamin Stora, *La guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004), pp. 556-557; Sylvie Thénault, *Histoire de la guerre d’indépendance algérienne* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005), pp. 100-101.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., Thénault, pp. 59.

⁶²⁶ General Marcel Bigeard, *Pour une parcelle de gloire* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1975), pp. 219.

militarily weak insurgents, the French authorities had been unable to stem the rapid increase in the strength and geographical reach of the rebellion.

The new military commander, General Salan, brought a decisive shift in French military strategy. Whereas French counterinsurgency strategy in the first two phases of the war had focused on the military wing of the rebellion, the new strategy identified the local population as the campaign's true center of gravity. Under Salan's leadership, French forces used new psychological weapons to break the hold of the rebels over the population and restore French authority. Salan's arrival brought with it new strategies and new operational innovations, both owing a good deal to his own experiences in the later phases of Indochina. If, as Trinquier had quipped, the first two years of the Algerian war had been a replay of Indochina circa 1946, then the coming of Salan was a leap forward to Indochina circa 1953.

The results of Salan's Model 2 strategies were mixed. On the one hand, strategy appeared to arrest the slide the deterioration in French fortunes. Salan's initiatives, particularly those in the areas of pacification and border control, appeared to arrest and even reverse the spread of the rebellion. Major operational successes in the Battle of Algiers (1957) and the Battle of the Frontiers (1958) inflicted great damage on the FLN and appeared to validate many of the core elements of the new French strategy. On the other hand, it was unclear whether these results were decisive or permanent. French authorities exercised physical control over an increasing share of the Muslim population, but they were unable to get an unbiased indication of the stability or permanence of that control. Population control had also involved a sweeping militarization of French administration. From the declaration of martial law in Algiers in 1957 through the

decision to grant Salan unified civil and military powers in 1958, this period saw the progressive diminution of the remaining elements of civilian control in strategy and policy. By the end of Salan's tenure in late 1958, the stage had been set for a final wave of offensives against the remaining rebels inside Algeria. Though the French had not brought the rebellion to an end, the military had managed to contain it. What is more, the military had convinced itself that complete success was within reach. But containment by force is not the same as the establishment of legitimate authority. As the French would discover, the force levels necessary to impose direct rule and suppress violence are massive and the results fleeting.

From Escalation to Search: Trends and Episodes

It was a combination of trends and episodes that precipitated the shift in French strategy in late 1956. By that time, the major trends in the rebellion were negative. Whether measured in terms of rebel attacks, end strength, or unit size, the FLN appeared to be gaining momentum. Since these trends appeared immune to the massive escalation in French manpower and the loosening of official and unofficial strictures on the use of force, the Model 1 strategy had reached its logical limit.

While these trends set the stage for a change in strategy, two major shocks in the fall of 1956 accelerated the move to Salan's Model 2 strategy. The first involved the French capture of the external leadership of the F.L.N. on October 22, 1956. Acting without the approval of either the Governor-General or the Prime Minister, Generals Lorillot and Beaufre approved a plan to intercept the F.L.N. delegation en route between Morocco and Tunisia. The French pilot of the civilian airliner agreed to land the plane in

Algiers rather than Tunis, delivering Ben Bella and several of his high ranking colleagues into the hands of the French authorities. While the Prime Minister and President were outraged by this military power grab, they had little choice but to accept the outcome.

The military's rationale was twofold. First, the seizure might decapitate the FLN movement and sever its ties with Nasser. Second, the capture would make French negotiations with the FLN impossible. With the movement's leaders in custody, there was no way that the civilian government could carry on secret talks leading to federalism or Algerian independence.

The results of the seizure were at once disappointing and ominous. The capture did not cripple the FLN. As the documents seized from the leaders revealed, Ben Bella was not the undisputed leader of the FLN and his removal did little to upset rebel operations inside Algeria. Furthermore, the capture of Ben Bella removed the most moderate element, inadvertently swinging power to the more radical faction led by Ramdane Abbane.⁶²⁷ The seizure also provoked heated reactions in Tunisia and Morocco. Whatever role these states might have played in pressuring the FLN to negotiate on terms favorable to France had been lost. From this point onward, both former French territories would act as sponsors of the FLN rather than intermediaries or advocates of French policy.

The same fixation on the external dimension of the Algerian rebellion led the French to embark on the Suez expedition of November 1956. Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez canal in July 1956 had provoked strong reactions throughout the West and led to a curious alliance among the United Kingdom, France and Israel.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., Meynier, *Histoire Intérieure du FLN*, pp. 195.

Though the parties each had distinct and only partially overlapping objectives,⁶²⁸ the primary French motivation was Algeria. There was a consensus among French civil and military leaders that the Egyptians had sponsored the outbreak and subsequent expansion of the rebellion. Even Jacques Soustelle, who, more than any other French leader, appreciated the role that domestic discontent had played, argued in a July 1956 article that Nasser saw the Algerian rebellion as his “most important task” in a broader African campaign of “agitation and subversion.”⁶²⁹

Though we now know that Nasser’s role was relatively limited,⁶³⁰ French elites of the time saw Egypt as the China of the Algerian war. Egyptian agitation neatly explained how a passive and fundamentally pro-French Algerian population could rise up in organized revolt against the authorities.⁶³¹ This condescending view of popular motivation and radical strength was also reassuring on a prescriptive level; a rebellion that was external in inspiration could be defeated by external action. The seizure on October 16, 1956 of an Egyptian yacht, the *Athos*, bearing a sizeable arms shipment, appeared to confirm Cairo’s central role in Algeria.⁶³²

Convinced of Nasser’s central role, the French leadership saw a strike on Egypt as one way out of the Algerian quagmire. In its final form, the plot combined an Israeli ground invasion of the Sinai with French and British amphibious landings and air drops (Operation Musketeer) to secure the Suez canal. In retrospect, the strategic reasoning of

⁶²⁸ For a more complete account of the motives of the three players, see Keith Kyle, *Suez* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991).

⁶²⁹ Jacques Soustelle, “La rébellion algérienne dans le cadre du pan-arabisme,” *Revue de Défense Nationale* (juillet 1956).

⁶³⁰ Robert Holland, “dirty wars: Algeria and Cyprus compared, 1954-1962,” in Charles-Robert Ageron, Marc Michel (eds.) *L’ère des décolonisations: Sélection de texts du colloque «Décolonisations comparées» Aix-en-Provence, 30 septembre-3 octobre 1993* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1995), pp. 40.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, Droz, pp. 103;

⁶³² Matthew Connolly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origin of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 114; *ibid.*, Le Mire, pp. 92; *ibid.*, Horne 158.

the three parties appears deeply flawed. A modest operation that was limited to the Sinai and the Canal Zone was unlikely to topple the regime. A more direct and aggressive bid to unseat Nasser might precipitate a new guerilla campaign in Egypt. Neither outcome bring a speedy resolution in Algeria. As the French commander of the expedition, later acknowledged, even regime change in Egypt would only have opened breathing room for overdue political reform in Algeria. Given the weakness of the Fourth Republic and the vocal opposition of the *pied noir* lobby, it seems unlikely that a victory at Suez would have improved the French position in Algeria.⁶³³

The eventual French and British operation against the canal zone was a military success and a political disaster. While the allied troops easily overwhelmed the Egyptian air and land forces, the U.S. reacted sharply to the expedition. Through overt financial and diplomatic pressure, the U.S. forced the two powers to withdraw from Egypt. An operation that had been designed to relieve pressure in Algeria had backfired. The diversion of the bulk of the French theater reserve in Algeria into the training and execution of Musketeer had forced a five month pause in offensive operations inside Algeria.⁶³⁴ The humiliating withdrawal of allied forces from Suez demonstrated French vulnerability to international pressure, a point that was not lost on an FLN leadership whose chances of outright military victory in Algeria remained slim. The circumstances

⁶³³ André Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956* (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 144-145.

⁶³⁴ The forces of the theater reserve began planning for Operation Musketeer on August 7, 1956 and returned to Algeria on or about December 25, 1956 – a period of 140 days (Source: Jean Delmas, *La Bataille d'Alger* (Paris: Larousse, 2007), pp. 39-40; Lieutenant-colonel Claude Carré, "Aspects opérationnels du conflit Algérien 1954-1960," *Revue historique des Armées*, Vol. 166, No. 1 (mars 1987), pp. 86.

of the withdrawal fueled the military's resentment of a seemingly impotent civil leadership.⁶³⁵

The capture of Ben Bella and the Suez expedition had sprung from a shared understanding of the rebellion. Both were predicated on a belief that the rebellion was external in origin and that the elimination of the leadership or the state sponsor could tip the scales of the counterinsurgency campaign inside Algeria. The manifest failure of both operations delivered the final blow to an already shaky French strategy, drawing attention to the deterioration of the struggle inside Algeria and the fruitlessness of attempts to resolve it through external action. The French had pursued four avenues in Algeria in the first two years of the war: military response, political reform and repression, decapitation of the external leadership, and direct attack on external sponsors.⁶³⁶ All these avenues were now shut. While the need for an alternative strategy was starkly apparent, that strategy would be confined to Algeria proper.

If the negative trends in Algeria and the shock of Suez provided the impetus for search, it was the military and the Indochina veterans in particular who directed it. The increasing scale of the military effort and civilian abdication of police and administrative functions left the military to chart its own course. While Lacoste and the metropolitan government did little to interfere or block military initiatives, it was increasingly clear that the army and not the civil government was the senior partner in Algerian policy and counterinsurgency strategy.

⁶³⁵ John Talbott, *The War Without a Name: France in Algeria, 1954-1962* (New York: Knopf, 1980), pp. 71-72; Général Maurice Challe, *Notre Révolte* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1968), pp. 25-32.

⁶³⁶ This list does not include the Mollet government's secret negotiations with the FLN exterior leadership in the spring and summer of 1956. Though these talks made some progress, they did not overcome the major issues of elections, self-determination and the role of FLN in these matters. French commitment to these talks remains unclear, and some historians have argued that they were simply an attempt to divert Algerian attention from the UN (Source: Droz, Lever, pp. 99-102).

General Salan's appointment as the military commander in Algeria in December 1956 signaled the return of the Indochina veterans. While various veterans of Indochina had played important roles at the local and even senior levels in the first two years of the war, Salan brought with him a set of advisers steeped in the doctrine of *la guerre révolutionnaire*. Salan and his staff believed that the key to the Algerian war, and the lost opportunity of the Indochina war, lay in a shift from conventional combat to the political warfare of their onetime enemies, the Viet Minh. With the growing influx of Indochina veterans, the French army was increasingly receptive to this alternative paradigm. The presence of powerful advocates in Paris, including the Chief of Staff, General Ely,⁶³⁷ buttressed Salan's shift from Model 1 to Model 2. Having played out the Model 1 solution to its logical and material limits, the army now turned to the Model 2 experiments of Indochina as the answer to the Algerian dilemma.

Politics as war by other means: Salan's Model 2 Strategy

General Salan's strategy had four principal components: the isolation of the Algerian battlefield, the imposition of order in major urban areas, aggressive rural pacification through psychological action, and the pursuit of ALN guerillas in their sanctuaries.⁶³⁸ Though Salan's strategy drew on the pioneering efforts of earlier commanders, his put population control and psychological operations ahead of traditional pursuit operations represented a clear break with Model 1 in favor of Model 2. The

⁶³⁷ From his sponsorship of the Indochina lessons learned volume through the course of the Algerian war, General Ely was firmly committed to the concept of *la guerre révolutionnaire* and the use of psychological operations to bolster friendly morale and undermine the insurgent enemy. Colonel Lacheroy, the most prominent theorist of G,R was a member of Ely's staff from 1956 through 1958 (Sources: Andre-Paul Comor, "Le général Ely et la guerre d'Algérie," *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 229 (décembre 2002), pp. 83-92.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., Salan, pp. 57-58; *ibid.*, Galula, pp. 62-63.

French army had moved from a Model 1 strategy that denied the importance of mass politics to one made the imposition of a new brand of authoritarian politics the centerpiece of French strategy.

Political Indoctrination and Model 2

Salan's strategy rested on a belief in the centrality of politics in revolutionary war. While a number of Indochina veterans and military theorists shared this belief, not all soldiers embraced the new gospel. In spite of the defeat in Indochina and the rapid deterioration of the French position in the first two years of the war, many officers remained wedded to a Model 1 conception of the war and skeptical of Salan's Model 2 reformulation.⁶³⁹

Salan's answer to this skepticism was political re-education. Taking the existing Center for Pacification and Counter-Guerilla Training (CIPCG) at Arzew, a school established by General Lorillot in December 1955 to prepare newly assigned officers and non-commissioned officers for the tactical challenges of the war in Algeria, Salan made its primary mission the transmission of the gospel of GR.⁶⁴⁰ Salan directed all prospective commanders to attend the CIPG in the hope that this psychological warfare training would convert skeptics into effective cadres for the new doctrine:

Henceforth...every officer posted to ...[Algeria] who is liable to be assigned command of a sector, a district, or a section will undertake a period of training at the CIPCG. The emphasis will be placed on psychological action so as to persuade the future leaders of the pacification effort that regaining the population's adherence to France constitutes the ultimate stake in the struggle being waged in Algeria. In this vein, I have laid down to the generals in command of the army corps in Algeria that they shall send elite officers who have particularly excelled

⁶³⁹ Ibid., Salan, pp. 231.

⁶⁴⁰“ Lt. Colonel Frédéric Guelton, “The French Army ‘Centre for Training and Preparation in Counter-Guerilla Warfare’ (CIPCG) at Arzew” in Martin S. Alexander, J.F.V. Keiger, *France and the Algerian War 1954-1962: Strategy, Operations, and Diplomacy* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), pp. 37; *ibid.*, Villatoux, pp. 442-443.

in command, to Arzew for short periods during which they will give talks and direct the discussions among those on the course.⁶⁴¹

Salan argued that psychological tools would enable the army to influence political events inside Algeria and in metropolitan France:

The accent will be placed on the psychological action that needs to be initiated or followed through. These notions are not given much attention in the teaching at the training schools in metropolitan France. It is important, therefore, to instill it in the cadres who are coming into the theatre because, here, the stake in the struggle we are engaged in lies not just in the destruction of an armed enemy and a political enemy, but above all in winning back the population of France.⁶⁴²

The school's new commander, Lieutenant Colonel Bruge, took a curriculum that had been focused exclusively on counter-guerilla tactics⁶⁴³ and recast it as a course in political warfare. This political instruction had three distinct effects. First, it focused professional officers on a new set of explicitly political topics, many of which were integral to successful pacification. Second, it implanted a specific set of political ideas that emphasized the importance of psychological coercion and potentially extralegal means. The recognition that Algeria was a "political" war did not alter the military's underlying belief in coercion as the primary logical framework. Instead, "political" war meant the addition of new weapons, chiefly propaganda and resettlement, and an expansion in the set of legitimate targets to include the civil population. And third, the Arzew curriculum suggested that the French polity and political leadership were legitimate and necessary targets in the Army's psychological warfare campaign. Implicit in this characterization of the French polity was the messianic role of the professional military. Together, these ideas provided the justification for the authoritarian pacification

⁶⁴¹ General Salan, letter no. 4399, to the Minister Resident for Algeria (9 September 1957), 1H 2523, dossier 1, SHAT as quoted in Guelton, "The French Army 'Centre for Training and Preparation in Counter-Guerilla Warfare' (CIPCG) at Arzew," pp. 41-42.

⁶⁴² General Salan, Directive no. 4 233/RM 10/PSY (1 October 1957) on reform of CIPCG, 1H 2523, SHAT as quoted in Guelton, pp. 42.

⁶⁴³ As late as December 1956, the center devoted just 14% of its curriculum to political or psychological warfare (ibid., Guelton, pp. 38).

campaigns of the late war and an equally compelling rationale for military disobedience after 1958.

The Arzew experiment also highlighted the gap between civilian and military understandings of the political dimension of the war. For civilian leaders, politics meant bargaining: the use of incentives and threats to convince a party to accept a desired political outcome, in this case the political integration of Algeria and France. For the military, politics meant coercion in a novel context. To paraphrase Clausewitz, politics was an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will.⁶⁴⁴ Propaganda, authoritarian organization and resettlement were non-lethal weapons used to compel the submission of unwilling opponents; they were not tools for a negotiation between equal or consenting parties. The legitimate targets for such weapons were far broader, including not only the native Algerian population but also the French population and political establishment. For the military, the incorporation of political considerations did not lead to a change in the logical framework of the profession; instead it meant that politics would be pursued as war by other means.

Isolating the battlefield: The Morice Line

To make cumulative progress in pacification, the French had to find a way to seal the borders with Tunisia and Morocco. It was the availability of weapons and sanctuaries that had made possible the rapid expansion of the ALN in 1955 and 1956. The independence of Tunisia and Morocco in 1956 had made the problem far more difficult.

⁶⁴⁴ Carl von Clausewitz, Michael Howard, Peter Paret (ed., tr.), *On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 75.

Long and porous borders,⁶⁴⁵ and weak or sympathetic host governments, enabled the FLN to move men and weapons into and out of Algeria with relative impunity.⁶⁴⁶ Since Muslim volunteers were abundant at this time, the binding constraint on the expansion of the revolt was military weaponry.⁶⁴⁷ By the end of 1956, with roughly 800 weapons a month moving into Algeria across the two land borders,⁶⁴⁸ the viability of internal pacification was increasingly in doubt. Even with the eightfold expansion in French troop levels between 1954 and 1957 (50,000 in October 1954 to 400,000 by 1957), the French lacked the forces to seal the eastern and western borders using traditional methods.

Starting in 1956, the local commanders in the border regions began to explore the use of barrier systems to interrupt the free flow of men and materiel. The systems started as local experiments with relatively simple barbed wire obstacles along the Moroccan border. In spite of considerable resistance from a skeptical high command,⁶⁴⁹ a local commander, Colonel Durr, began in January 1957 to build a 14 km line of improved obstacles that incorporated mines and electrified fences.⁶⁵⁰ Though this small array did not stop rebel infiltration entirely, the combination of mines and electrification enabled

⁶⁴⁵ The usable border between Tunisia and Algeria stretched some 380 km from the Mediterranean to the relatively impassable Sahara desert in the south. In the west, the Moroccan border ran some 550 km from the sea to the desert (Source: Général Jean Delmas, "L'Évolution des barrages frontières en Algérie: La Bataille des Frontières," *Revue internationale d'histoire militaire*, Vol. 76, 1997, pp. 56).

⁶⁴⁶ Général Charles Ailleret, *Général du Contingent: En Algérie 1961-1962* (Paris; Bernard Grasset, 1998), pp. 22-24.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., Galula, *Pacification*, pp. 61.

⁶⁴⁸ General Maurice Faivre, "L'ALN extérieure face aux barrages frontaliers," *Revue internationale d'histoire militaire*, Vol. 76, 1997, pp. 95-96.

⁶⁴⁹ Senior commanders initially resisted these initiatives on the grounds that a "Maginot line" would not solve the ALN infiltration problem. These same commanders worried that the ALN would be able to steal mines along the border and use them against French forces inside Algeria (Source: Delmas, "L'Évolution des barrages," pp. 56).

⁶⁵⁰ Contre-amiral Bernard Estival, "Origines et évolution du barrage électrifié à la frontière Algéro-marocaine: l'exemple du 3^e bataillon de la demi-brigade de fusiliers marins," *Revue internationale d'histoire militaire*, Vol. 76, 1997, pp. 151; Ibid., Delmas, pp. 57.

the commander to identify infiltration attempts and employ his reaction forces more effectively. In the month following the installation, six of the eleven major FLN attempts to breach this stretch of the Moroccan frontier failed entirely.⁶⁵¹

The promise of these early experiments, and the accelerating flow of arms and men across the Tunisian border in 1957,⁶⁵² led Salan and the Defense Minister André Morice to endorse the application of the barrier principle on a grand scale.⁶⁵³ The construction of large scale electrified fences and minefields along the Tunisian border in the summer and fall of 1957 fundamentally altered the nature of the infiltration problem. FLN leaders in Tunisia found it increasingly difficult to maintain the flows of men and materiel necessary to maintain the armed struggle within Algeria. For the French high command, the barriers made cumulative progress in the pacification campaign feasible.

This shift in the terms of rebel supply set the stage for the largest military clashes of the Algerian war. Initially dismissive of the French system, the ALN command realized by the end of 1957 that the survival of the internal struggle depended on overcoming the challenge of the barriers.⁶⁵⁴ Determined to bring infiltration along the Tunisian border to an end, General Salan gave General Vanuxem the bulk of the French theater reserve, including five airborne regiments, to bring the ALN forces to battle along the Morice line.⁶⁵⁵ From January to May 1958, these mobile forces fought a series of pitched battles in front of and behind the eastern (Tunisian) obstacle belts. The ALN, desperate to maintain contact with its units inside Algeria, threw entire companies and

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., Estival, pp. 153.

⁶⁵² By mid-1957 the FLN was moving 2,000 individuals and 1,000 weapons across the Tunisian border each month (Source: Delmas, "L'Évolution des barrages," pp. 57-58).

⁶⁵³ Ibid., Salan, pp. 64-65.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., Meynier, pp. 296.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., Delmas, pp. 60; *ibid.*, Le Mire, pp. 198

battalions at the barriers in an attempt to breach or bypass the lines. The concentration of ALN forces and the availability of large mobile forces enabled the French to fight the ALN forces on quasi-conventional terms.

By the end of the ALN push in May 1958, the rebels had suffered a crippling defeat. On the military balance sheet alone the results of the “Battle of the Frontiers” were stark; for a loss of 279 French dead and 758 wounded, the French had managed to kill 4,000 ALN fighters, capture nearly 600 others and inflict an estimated 1,000 additional casualties.⁶⁵⁶ In the process, the French captured some 350 crew served weapons and nearly 3,000 individual weapons. More important still, the Battle of the Frontiers put an end to large scale FLN infiltration from the base areas. From 1958 through the end of the war, the number of armed rebels stranded in Tunisian and Moroccan base areas rose dramatically as French offensives inside Algeria pummeled remaining ALN forces of the interior. The interruption of supply led to greater tension between the FLN exterior leadership and the ALN forces trapped inside the country.

The French command continued to improve the barrier systems from 1957 through the end of the war. Though the core remained the electrified fence lines, the barriers evolved into complex systems of mines, ground surveillance radars, mechanized and airmobile reaction forces, and fixed wing aviation that gave the French a genuine cooperative engagement capability.⁶⁵⁷ Many rebel attempts to breach the barriers were detected by ground surveillance radars and aircraft long before the rebels reached the fence line. This enabled the French to respond to the attempted penetration with air

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., Le Mire, 217-218; *ibid.*, Meynier, pp. 297; *ibid.*, Faivre, pp. 98; *ibid.*, Horne, pp. 266.

⁶⁵⁷ Philippe Alix, “Une technologies nouvelle pendant la guerre d’Algérie: Le système radars-canons sur le barrage algéro-tunisien (1957-1962),” *Revue internationale d’histoire militaire*, Vol. 76, 1997, pp. 171-187; *ibid.*, Salan, pp. 221-228; *ibid.*, Le Mire, pp. 197.

mobile troops, armored cars or artillery fire.⁶⁵⁸ When the rebels reached the electrified fence, the interruption of electrical current alerted the mobile reach forces. At the cost of some x MM francs and a dedicated force of 80,000 troops, the French had managed to isolate the Algerian battlefield. This isolation made possible the aggressive pacification campaigns of General Challe in 1959 and 1960.

Order in Urban Areas: The Battles of Algiers (January-October 1957)

The FLN's decision in 1956 to bring the war to the streets of the capital Algiers set the stage for one of the climactic battles of the war. Unable to control the spiral of violence, Lacoste called on Generals Salan and Massu restore order in the city. Using a combination of force, authoritarian control and organization of the population, and psychological operations, they managed to crush the FLN cells in Algiers and impose order in the capital. Dramatic success in Algiers convinced Salan that these strategies were a viable template for the entire campaign. The battle also marked a new high point in military power and confidence. Called upon to salvage a seemingly hopeless security situation, the army emerged from the battle convinced of its basic superiority over a weak and divided civil apparatus.

The battle of Algiers had its roots in a tit for tat escalation between French authorities and the increasingly radical FLN. The French decision to step up the judicial execution of captured FLN leaders prompted Ramdane Abane to order the leaders of the

⁶⁵⁸ For examples of successful and unsuccessful ALN breaches of the barrier lines, see Mohammed Harbi, Gilbert Meynier, *Le FLN: Documents et Histoire, 1954-1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2004), pp. 88-92, and Matelot Jérôme Souverain, "L'opération dans le Djebel du Mzi, Un binôme de choc: hélicoptères de l'aéronautique navale et groupement des commandos maritime (7 mai 1960)," *Revue historique des armées*, n° 200 (septembre 1995), pp. 119-126.

FLN network in Algiers, Ben M'Hidi and Yacef Saadi, to attack French civilians.⁶⁵⁹ In the space of five days in late June, the FLN assassinated 49 European civilians; this prompted *pied noir* vigilantes to bomb a suspected FLN safe house in the Casbah, killing 70 Muslims.⁶⁶⁰ With 150 militants and some 5,000 supporters in greater Algiers,⁶⁶¹ the FLN opted in September to escalate to the use of bombs against European civilian targets.

The French civil authorities were unable to control the escalation in violence. Lacoste and the Mollet government feared that rising disorder in Algiers might fatally undermine the French war efforts. The chaos in the capital contributed to the impression, at home and abroad, that Algeria was a lost cause. On the local level, Lacoste feared that his inability to stop FLN violence might ignite a full blown race war between *pied noirs* and the Muslims.⁶⁶²

With no end in sight and indications of an FLN general strike planned to coincide with the opening of the UN session on January 28, 1957,⁶⁶³ Lacoste turned to his generals. On January 7, 1957, Lacoste officially transferred sweeping civil powers to

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., Delmas, *La bataille d'Alger*, pp. 37; *ibid.*, Meynier, pp. 322-323.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., Horne, pp. 183-184; *ibid.*, Delmas, pp. 39.

⁶⁶¹ There is considerable disagreement about the total number of armed insurgents and supporters in Algiers. John Talbott argues that the number of militants was considerably smaller, falling somewhere between 100 and 150 (*ibid.*, Talbott, pp. 80). The Algerian historian, Mohamed Teguia estimates that there were 200 *fedayin* and five major leaders in the capital; Jean Delmas agrees that the total number of fighters was small but that the number of supporters was much higher (*ibid.*, Delmas, pp. 70). Roger Trinquier, the French staff officer charged with organization of the First Battle of Algiers, put the total number of insurgents considerably higher: 1,200 armed insurgents and 4,500 supporters (Colonel Roger Trinquier, *Le Temps Perdu* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1978), pp.243).

⁶⁶² Paul Aussaresses, the officer in charge of Massu's interrogation and direct action teams states that Massu had been informed of a *pied noir* plot to burn the Casbah to the ground if the authorities and the army failed to bring FLN violence under control (*ibid.*, Aussaresses, pp. 98). For more general concerns about rising ethnic tensions, see Jacques Massu, *La Vraie Bataille d'Alger* (Paris: Plon, 1971), pp. 31-32 and Salan, pp. 79-81.

⁶⁶³ Ibid., Massu, pp. 90; *ibid.*, Connelly, pp. 125.

General Massu, the commander of the 10th Parachute Division.⁶⁶⁴ The arrival of the 3,200 paratroopers of the 10th Division and 1,400 additional troops effectively doubled the number of military forces in Algiers.⁶⁶⁵

With blanket powers and reinforcements at his disposal, Massu turned to a trusted Indochina veteran, Colonel Roger Trinquier, to develop a plan of action. Trinquier set out, “to make the inhabitants join an organization capable of cooperating in the fight against terror by providing us intelligence.”⁶⁶⁶ In his opinion, the French authorities could only hope to root out the FLN cells and prevent future resurgence by incorporating the native population into a new and robust set of French designed organizations.

To accomplish this, Trinquier developed a three step process. In the opening phase, French troops would restrict the movement of the Muslim population. Using patrols and traffic control points, and a “shoot on sight” curfew, French military forces would increase the pressure on the FLN forces in the city. At the same time, teams of police and military would conduct a detailed census of the population. Each block, building, and neighborhood in the Muslim areas would be entrusted to a Muslim warden, generally a veteran of French military service.⁶⁶⁷ This warden would be responsible for reporting the status and activities of all residents under his charge. This system, which Trinquier referred to as the *dispositif de protection urbaine* or D.P.U., was the cornerstone of his strategy to clear and then hold the Muslim neighborhoods. In the second phase, the French would use existing police files and new information garnered

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., Massu, pp. 32-33.

⁶⁶⁵ Massu estimated that the introduction of his 4,600 troops in January 1957 doubled the number of military forces present in the capital. In addition, the French authorities had some 1,100 police, 55 national gendarmes, 800 part time reserve police units (CRS), 1,200-1,500 militia troops (pied noir) (Massu, pp. 44, 99).

⁶⁶⁶ This was Trinquier’s summary as related by Salan in his memoirs (ibid., Salan, pp. 68). Trinquier echoed these sentiments in his own memoirs (ibid., Trinquier, pp. 243-243).

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., Le Mire, pp. 117.

through the census to round up suspected FLN members. The interrogation of these suspects would then provide the information necessary to conduct targeted raids on the remaining FLN safe houses. In the third phase, Trinquier and his staff would use the D.P.U. system to consolidate French control and maintain a highly intrusive intelligence network.⁶⁶⁸

What would come to be known as the First Battle of Algiers stretched from the assumption of power by Massu in early January 1957 to the capture of Ben M'Hidi at the end of March 1957. In the First Battle, with the D.P.U. in its infancy, French forces relied heavily on the 2,000 existing police files⁶⁶⁹ and aggressive interrogation. The initial roundup of suspects primed the intelligence machine; the interrogation those suspects gave the French authorities the information they needed to stage follow on raids against the remaining cells. Over time, Trinquier built a comprehensive, organizational diagram of the FLN cells – a product he referred to as his *organigramme*. The perceived urgency of the task led Massu to condone the use of torture.⁶⁷⁰ Though torture had occurred in the earlier stages of the war, its use by military leaders had been more sporadic and unofficial. With the assumption of civil powers, and extensive interaction with the police, torture became more systematic. According to Paul Aussaresses, the officer responsible for the special army/police interrogation teams, he used torture to extract the names of FLN cell members and populate the *organigramme*. The goal of the teams was to extract the information as quickly as possible. Working at night, the teams would grab a handful of suspects, extract new names, and grab a second batch before dawn. The rapid exploitation of enabled the French to roll up entire cells before the

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., Aussaresses, pp. 115-116.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., Aussaresses, pp. 99, 108.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., Aussaresses, pp. 97, 146-147; *ibid.*, Massu, pp. 163-170.

enemy could react.⁶⁷¹ Once suspects had been tortured, they were generally executed and their bodies dumped in remote locations outside the city.⁶⁷²

With this combination of movement controls, extensive searches, targeted military action, and aggressive interrogation, Massu crippled the FLN structure in Algiers in three months. As the graph below shows, the introduction of Massu's forces drove the number of FLN attacks down from 112 in January to 39 in February.⁶⁷³ Reeling under the shock of the French offensive, the FLN leadership went to ground.⁶⁷⁴ The capture of the FLN political leader, Ben M'Hidi, on February 16 marked the culmination of the First Battle of Algiers.⁶⁷⁵

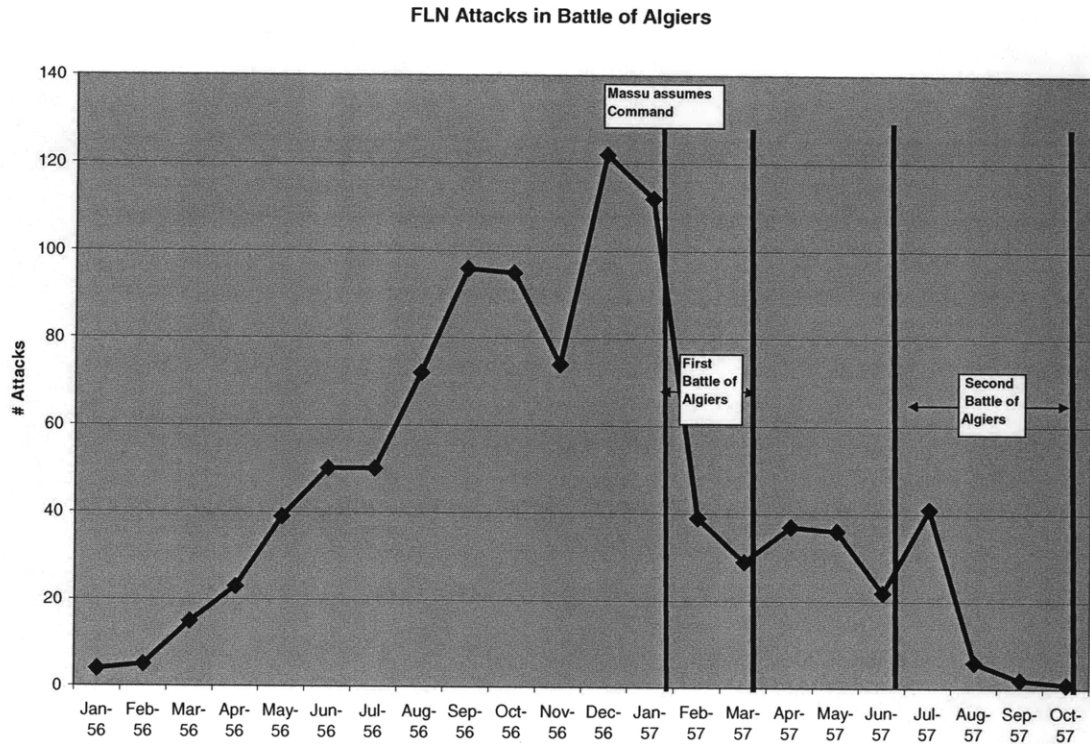
⁶⁷¹ Roger Trinquier, (tr. Daniel Lee), *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), pp. 23; *ibid.*, Aussaresses, pp. 145-147.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, Aussaresses, pp. 171.

⁶⁷³ All the data in the graph are drawn from Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire Intérieure du FLN (1954-1962)*, pp. 728.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Massu, pp. 127.

⁶⁷⁵ Ben M'Hidi died in French custody. While French leaders at the time claimed that he had committed suicide, Paul Aussaresses has admitted that he personally executed Ben M'Hidi at the behest of General Massu (*ibid.*, Aussaresses, pp. 162-170).



French success in the First Battle of Algiers was so complete by March that Salan pulled three of the four para regiments out of Algiers to pursue the remaining ALN rebels in the interior. While the success of the campaign and shifts in FLN activity drove this decision, the unease of civil leaders contributed to calls for a drawdown. French press reports of widespread torture in Algiers made the redeployment of the bulk of the 10th Division a welcome step in the eyes of government officials in Paris and Algiers.⁶⁷⁶ Within the Algiers administration, Paul Teitgen, the secretary general of police in Algiers, had had protested the aggressive detention and interrogation of suspects. Though he had grudgingly signed off on thousands of requests for summary detention,⁶⁷⁷ he tendered his resignation to Lacoste in May 1957.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., Delmas, pp. 129-130; Le Mire, pp. 116.

⁶⁷⁷ Ted Morgan, *My Battle of Algiers: A Memoir* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2005), pp. 139.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., Aussaresses, pp. 150.

The withdrawal of the three of the four regiments in April gave both sides an opportunity to reassess. Yacef Saadi, the FLN military commander in Algiers and successor to Ben M'Hidi, sought to re-establish the cells and reconstitute the bomb units. Massu's staff, under the leadership of Colonels Trinquier and Godard shifted their focus from the imposition of physical, military control ("*contrôle en surface*") to the development of a more durable form of population control ("*contrôle en profondeur*").⁶⁷⁹ Whereas French efforts in the First Battle had necessarily depended on high force levels and aggressive interrogation or torture, the efforts to hold and consolidate the gains were built on the D.P.U. system and a growing informer network. Trinquier selected Captain Paul-Alain Léger to form a surveillance unit composed of Algerian Muslims. This group, formally known as the *Groupe de Renseignement det d'Exploitation* (G.R.E.), disguised as common laborers or "bleus," would monitor activity in Muslim neighborhoods and seek to infiltrate the FLN organization.⁶⁸⁰

After three months of relative calm, the FLN reemerged in the capital in June 1957. The killing of 80 unarmed Muslims by French paratroopers in the Ruisseau massacre set off a new round violence.⁶⁸¹ Yacef, eager to respond to the French massacre, began a new round of bombings. The spectacular attack on the Casino de la Corniche, a popular *pied noir* establishment, on June 9 set off another wave of vigilante attacks.⁶⁸² Once again, the city appeared on the verge of a race war. The unprecedented scale of the Casino bombing (9 dead, 85 wounded) and rising ethnic tensions led Massu

⁶⁷⁹ For a discussion of the distinctions between these two terms, see Massu, pp. 127-128.

⁶⁸⁰ Paul-Alain Léger, *Aux carrefours de la guerre* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1983), pp. 217.

⁶⁸¹ The incident began with the killing of two French paras by the FLN. The paras responded by entering a nearby Turkish bathhouse and killing all 80 Muslim occupants (Source: Horne, pp. 208-209; Morgan, pp. 197).

⁶⁸² Ibid., Morgan, pp. 198-201.

to recall two of his para regiments from the field and reimpose the curfew.⁶⁸³ The Second Battle of Algiers had begun.

Far from being a replay of the operations of January and February, however, the Second Battle of Algiers more closely resembled a police sting operation.⁶⁸⁴ Colonel Godard, the de facto coordinator of the second battle,⁶⁸⁵ capitalized on the work done by Trinquier and Léger. Trinquier's D.P.U. organization, whose membership was close to 7,500 by this point,⁶⁸⁶ provided the foundation for the renewed hunt for the FLN cells. Léger expanded and refined his use of the active GRE units or "bleus." Unable to penetrate the FLN network with his original team of ex-servicemen, Léger began to use captured FLN insurgents.⁶⁸⁷ By offering these insurgents an opportunity to avoid imprisonment or execution, Léger managed to recruit 70 agents and make significant progress against the reconstituted rebel network. Léger's agents first rolled up the intimidation squads, then used the "turned" insurgents to locate FLN members.⁶⁸⁸ According to Maurice Schmitt, a para officer who worked with Léger during this period, passive surveillance by the D.P.U. and active collection by the G.R.E. were the keys to the Godard's new approach. The blanket of surveillance turned the casbah from a sanctuary into a contested area, forcing the FLN to curtail its operations.⁶⁸⁹ When confronted with detailed evidence of their personal complicity and their specific place in

⁶⁸³ Ibid., Morgan, pp. 198-201.

⁶⁸⁴ Général Maurice Schmitt, *Alger-Été 1957: Une victoire sur le terrorisme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), pp. 27; *ibid.*, Massu, pp. 294.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., Massu, pp. 279.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., Trinquier, pp. 245.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., Villatoux, pp. 508-509.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., Schmitt, pp. 65.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., Schmitt, pp. 69.

the cellular organization, many captured insurgents disclosed information and agreed to work with the G.R.E..⁶⁹⁰

The gradual rollup of the FLN network over a two month period led to the capture of Yacef Saadi, the FLN military commander on August 24.⁶⁹¹ Once in custody, Yacef provided the information to locate and kill the last major FLN operative, Ali la Pointe. With his death on October 8, 1957, the Second Battle had come to a close.⁶⁹²

On the military level, Massu's operations in Algiers were a clear success. In January 1957, Massu had entered an environment of spiraling violence and rising ethnic tensions. By the fall that year, his forces had managed to stop the attacks and uproot the FLN cells in the city. What is more, the extensive informer network built by Trinquier and Godard gave the authorities a tool to maintain control and resist a resurgence of FLN activity.

However impressive Massu's accomplishments were, they had little direct impact on the military campaign elsewhere. The FLN, though forced to abandon Algiers, maintained a dominant position in many rural areas. The losses sustained in Algiers were easily replaced, and the French were forced to apply their new strategies in far more challenging rural environments.

Even the local victory in Algiers came at considerable cost. Firm control of the Muslim population had been won only through mass detention and interrogations that frequently ended in torture and execution. According to Paul Teitgen, over 24,000 Algerians had been officially detained (close to 6% of the total Muslim population of

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., Schmitt, pp. 71.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., Horne, pp. 216-217.

⁶⁹² Ibid., Leger, pp. 261.

Algiers);⁶⁹³ 3,024 remained unaccounted for at the end of the battle.⁶⁹⁴ In metropolitan France, reports of torture set off a wave of protests among by left wing elites. The French decision to censor a number of anti-war publications lent further credence to the charges.⁶⁹⁵ At home and abroad, the means used to secure victory had weakened the standing and legitimacy of the French government and army.⁶⁹⁶

The most significant impact of the battle was on French strategy. Unsettled by the army's methods, civilian leaders nevertheless balked at criticizing a clear military success. Lacoste and the police had failed to maintain or restore order in the capital; where they had failed, the military under Massu had succeeded. In the wake of Algiers, the easiest path was to leave strategy to the generals and focus only on clearly political projects such as constitutional reform.⁶⁹⁷ Military leaders drew two lessons from the victory in Algiers. First, the formula developed in Algiers – the targeted use of force, authoritarian population control, and psychological operations - was a viable prototype. Even after 1962, most leading French military figures cited Algiers as proof of the feasibility of a coercive solution in Algeria.⁶⁹⁸ Second, the victory had come as a result of unfettered military control over strategy and local administration. Godard's later assumption of joint civil-military powers in Algiers/Sahel region,⁶⁹⁹ and Salan's

⁶⁹³ This detention percentage is based on a Muslim population of 400,000.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., Aussaresses, pp. 195; ibid., Connelly, pp. 131.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., Connelly, pp. 132-133.

⁶⁹⁶ Gil Merom, "The Social Origins of French Capitulation in Algeria," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Summer 2004), pp. 610-612; ibid., Horne, pp. 219.

⁶⁹⁷ Robert Lacoste spent most of his tenure attempting to craft a political settlement that would satisfy Muslims and *pieds noirs*. This *loi cadre* provided for a nominally federal structure and a single electoral college. Strong dissent by the *pieds noirs* and the chaos of late 4th Republic politics ultimately doomed the project.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., Galula, pp. 143; ibid., Trinquier, pp. 251; ibid., Massu, pp. 327-328.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., Faivre, *Le Renseignement dans la guerre d'Algérie*, pp. 25, 41.

assumption of similar powers throughout Algeria in December 1958, marked the peak of military control in Algeria.

What French leaders tended to ignore were the peculiarities of the battle – the features that would ultimately limit the exportability of the Algiers model. The administrative, demographic, and spatial characteristics of Algiers heavily favored the French. Whereas the French lacked a detailed understanding of the enemy's rural networks, they had a far clearer understanding of affairs in the capital. The FLN had chosen to do battle in a place where French intelligence and informer networks were densest.⁷⁰⁰ Similarly, the victory came in a city that was over 40% European; only in the city of Oran did demographics favor the French more decisively. Moreover, the enemy's choice of the casbah as their primary sanctuary greatly simplified the problem for the French. The French could easily concentrate large numbers of forces on a neighborhood where movement could be relatively easily controlled and monitored. Maurice Schmitt has pointed out that FLN errors - relatively poor internal security and the willingness of key individuals to turn - explain the rapid and complete collapse of the Z.A.A.⁷⁰¹ What the French military regarded as a triumph of strategy looks in retrospect like the product of favorable circumstances, strategy and chance. While the French army would dedicate the next three years to the application of these methods in rural Algeria, they would never again encounter as favorable a set of circumstances or as accommodating a foe.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., Peyroulou, pp. 160-164.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., Schmitt, pp. 115.

Rural Pacification

Salan had made it clear from the outset that his first priority was population control. While Lorillot and others had laid the physical groundwork by establishing the *quadrillage* network, it took Salan to shift the main effort from pursuit to pacification. As in Algiers, pacification in the rural areas had two components: one destructive and the other constructive.⁷⁰² The first task was to break the rebel hold on the population. Whereas earlier commanders had done this by attacking insurgent bands, Salan and his disciples argued that the FLN's political-administrative organization (the O.P.A.) was the true center of gravity.⁷⁰³ Once the O.P.A. had been removed, the guerillas would weaken and pursuit would become easier. Construction involved the substitution of a French O.P.A. for that of the enemy. By organizing the population into parallel hierarchies,⁷⁰⁴ the French could maintain control and prevent rebel resurgence. The S.A.S. would form the core of this new O.P.A., and they would orchestrate the development of mobile (harkis) and static local units (self-defense groups (G.A.D.) or maghzen) to bind the population to the new organization.⁷⁰⁵

Drawing on his late war experiences in Indochina, Salan championed the slow and cumulative process of pacification over the more dramatic raids and envelopments of

⁷⁰² For a detailed explanation of this model by one of its leading proponents, General Allard, see Peter Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria: The Analysis of a Political and Military Doctrine* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), pp. 30-32. See also Villatoux, pp. 461.

⁷⁰³ Jacques Hogard, "Guerre révolutionnaire et Pacification," *Revue militaire d'information*, No. 280 (janvier 1957), pp. 21; *ibid.*, Salan, pp. 214; *ibid.*, Villatoux, pp. 461; *ibid.*, Le Mire, pp. 135.

⁷⁰⁴ The GR theorists argued that Viet Minh success had depended on the organization of the population into parallel hierarchies. The first was a vertical hierarchy based on strict chains of command. In theory, this "unified and territorial" hierarchy enabled the party to control the political, economic and social life of every member of the society through a series of committees and leaders. The second hierarchy was horizontal. This hierarchy incorporated every member into some organization appropriate to his "age, profession or religion." Together these parallel hierarchies gave the Viet Minh or similar states near total control over the population. For a more detailed treatment of this theory, see Jacques Hogard, "Guerre révolutionnaire et Pacification," pp. 8-9.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, Salan, pp. 234-236.

the parachute regiments. Whereas previous commanders had generally sought to concentrate troops to capture or kill significant enemy units, Salan and his supporters argued that dispersion and static control were a more effective way to defeat the insurgent threat.⁷⁰⁶ David Galula, a company commander and battalion executive officer during this period, described the shift in strategy in these terms:

Once the grid of static forces [*quadrillage*] had been established, with the emphasis on Kabylia, Salan considered his task done; it was now up to the local commander to deal with the situation in his Army corps or in his zone as best he could, with the occasional support of the theater reserves. Since the war in Algeria was tactically a multiplicity of small-scale affairs, no grandiose operation was conceivable, no large shifting of troops was warranted that would justify a more direct conduct of the operations by the Commander in Chief.⁷⁰⁷

While Salan and the GR school tended to discount the impact of large scale operations, arguing that small, local units were more effective in the clearance phase of pacification. Echoing the official reports on Indochina, Jacques Hogard argued that large scale encirclement operations were nearly impossible to pull off.⁷⁰⁸ By contrast, small units familiar with the local area were more likely to find and destroy the ALN bands.⁷⁰⁹ Moreover, local troops left in place for extended periods of time would be better placed to gain the confidence of the population and avoid the missteps and overkill associated with large scale military operations.

This shift in priorities and tactics set the stage for the application of the distinctive tools of revolutionary warfare: psychological warfare and resettlement. As noted earlier, Salan and many of his subordinates saw the result in Algiers as proof of the power of psychological operations and population control. In 1957, Salan placed much greater emphasis on the use of specially trained propaganda units and the S.A.S. to “rally” the

⁷⁰⁶ Allard as cited in Paret, pp. 35-36.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., Galula, pp. 63.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., Galula, pp. 195-199.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., Hogard, pp. 21-22.

native populations to the French cause. Advocates of GR assumed that the removal of the FLN O.P.A. and the skillful use of propaganda would convince local residents to support the government and convince insurgents of the futility of their own cause.⁷¹⁰

Salan also sponsored more clandestine and destructive psychological operations. Paul Léger, buoyed by his success with the *bleus* in Algiers, applied his defectors to the larger task of subverting the rural insurgency. Whereas Godard and Léger had used the *bleus* in Algiers to identify and eliminate insurgents, Léger focused his subsequent efforts on triggering purges inside the FLN structure. In an operation KJ 27, Léger succeeded in convincing the leaders of *wilayas* III and IV⁷¹¹ that their organizations had been thoroughly penetrated by French agents. By releasing a fictional list of the FLN traitors sparked a savage purge by Amirouche and other leading FLN figures.⁷¹² Though the exact figures remain uncertain, these purges cost the FLN some 2,000 dead in wilaya II alone.⁷¹³ More important, the wave of purges paralyzed much of the FLN organization from the middle of 1958 through Amirouche's own assassination in March 1959.⁷¹⁴ Over the course of the war, FLN internal purges, spontaneous and French orchestrated, cost the movement somewhere between 6,000 and 15,000 dead.⁷¹⁵ Early French successes in Algiers and clever manipulation of the paranoid tendencies of the FLN enabled Léger and his colleagues to inflict substantial losses with minimal investments.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., Paret, pp. 58.

⁷¹¹ The FLN had divided Algeria into 5 *wilayas* or zones of operations. *Wilaya* III was centered on the Kabylia region; *wilaya* IV covered the coastal zone from Algiers to Ténès, including the Ouarsenis region. Algiers fell under a separate geographical command – the autonomous zone of Algiers or Z.A.A.

⁷¹² For Captain Léger's personal account of this "bleuite" operation, see *ibid.* Léger, pp. 292-305.

⁷¹³ Ibid., Villatoux, pp. 509-512.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid., Thénault, pp. 85-86.

⁷¹⁵ Charles-Robert Ageron, "Complots et Purges dans l'armée de libération algérienne (1958-1961)," *Vingtième Siècle, Revue d'histoire*, No. 59 (July-September 1998), pp. 26; Guy Pervillé, "La guerre d'Algérie: Combien de morts?" in *ibid.*, Harbi, Stora, *La guerre d'Algérie*, pp. 713.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., Horne, pp. 260-261.

Resettlement of native populations, a strategy employed with some success in Cambodia in the later phases of the Indochina struggle,⁷¹⁷ emerged a natural complement to *quadrillage*, S.A.S. organization, and psychological operations. In theory, the controlled resettlement of rural populations protected them from attack and manipulation by the F.L.N.; in so doing, it gave the French authorities an opportunity to persuade them to support the state through a mix of political indoctrination and economic aid. At the same time, the evacuation of rural populations broke the link between the insurgents and their support base. Once the native population had been evacuated, any persons caught in the “prohibited zones” could be treated as hostile, greatly simplifying the offensive pursuit of the remaining F.L.N. bands.

As early as 1955, the military experimented with small scale resettlement in the Aurès region under the auspices of General Parlange’s experiments with S.A.S. pacification.⁷¹⁸ Between 1955 and the middle of 1957, the practice of *regroupement* remained relatively rare. Salan’s enthusiasm for Algiers style population control, and the writings of GR theorists, encouraged a move from experimentation to general application. Starting in the summer of 1957, local commanders, in conjunction with local S.A.S. units, began to uproot existing communities and nomads and resettle them in temporary camps.⁷¹⁹ Once the Algerians had been resettled, their old dwellings were destroyed to prevent their use by FLN forces.

⁷¹⁷ For a discussion of the Cambodian program, see Chapter 3. The sole source of reporting was one of the architects of the French program in Cambodia, on Captain Souyris. His 1956 article in the *Revue de Défense Nationale* appears to have captured the imagination of the theorists and later practitioners in Algeria.

⁷¹⁸ Charles-Robert Ageron, “Une dimension de la guerre d’Algérie: Les ‘regroupements’ de populations” in Jean-Charles Jauffret, Maurice Vaïsse, *Militaires et guérilla dans la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Éditions complexe, 2001), pp. ;ibid., Le Mire, pp. 137.

⁷¹⁹ Keith Sutton, “Army Administration Tensions over Algeria’s Centres de Regroupement, 1954-1962,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (November 1999), pp. 247-248.

French authorities then set about organizing the populations in a manner reminiscent of Trinquier's D.P.U.. The first step was a census of the inhabitants, a numbering of all dwellings, and the designation of individuals responsible for each house or group of houses. Once this had been completed, the authorities appointed a village council and recruited a village self-defense force.⁷²⁰ True to Trinquier's model, the desired outcome was an organized, protected, and evangelized community. Trinquier argued that this approach was far superior to the system of posts applied in Indochina was because it employed the local population in the struggle against the insurgents.⁷²¹ By Trinquier's own description, however, the system was explicitly authoritarian:

We then organize not just the defense of a sole military post, but that of an entire village and its inhabitants, making it a strategic hamlet. A tight, impassable perimeter is created...protected by a few armed blockhouses, manned with automatic weapons and capable of covering the whole perimeter.... Inhabitants of the nearest villages or isolate individuals are progressively brought within the security perimeter. Most of the others will come there themselves. The inhabitants are allowed to leave the village only by the gates, and all exits will be controlled. They are permitted to take neither money nor supplies with them. No one will be able to leave or enter the village by night. In effect we are re-establishing the old system of medieval fortified villages, designed to protect the inhabitants against marauding bands.⁷²²

While French authorities insisted that these resettlements were voluntary and largely a response to the increased threat of FLN reprisals,⁷²³ many civil servants and S.A.S. officers⁷²⁴ warned of the political and economic risks. If the authorities failed to provide the food, housing and employment to offset the disruption of resettlement, then the net result would be the impoverishment of the native population and their political alienation. Even in the summer and fall of 1957, in the very early stages of the nationwide *regroupement* policy, official reports highlighted the inability of the

⁷²⁰ Ibid., Le Mire, pp. 138.

⁷²¹ Ibid., Trinquier, *Modern Warfare*, pp. 73.

⁷²² Ibid., Trinquier, *Modern Warfare*, pp. 73-74.

⁷²³ Ibid., Le Mire, pp. 137.

⁷²⁴ Ibid., Ageron, "Une dimension de la guerre d'Algérie: Les 'regroupements' de populations," pp. 331.

authorities to meet many of these basic needs. The loss of agricultural and grazing lands and livestock led to severe malnutrition in many camps.⁷²⁵ While the authorities had planned to provide these populations with standards of living far in excess of those they had originally enjoyed, most resettled populations had to make due with tent cities and chronic unemployment. In spite of these warnings signs, military leaders endorsed an expansion of the program from 1957 on. By the end of 1957, the French had resettled 364,795 natives (~4% of the total Muslim population of 9 million) in 382 regroupement centers.⁷²⁶

While resettlement may have fallen short of its stated economic and social goals, it was enormously appealing to the French military. For Model 1 traditionalists, the removal of native populations from the countryside made the prosecution of a vigorous anti-guerilla campaign far simpler. The removal of village sanctuaries and food supplies weakened the military potential of the guerillas and enabled commanders to treat the evacuated countryside as a free fire zone. For Model 2 advocates, demographic concentration made rural population control possible. The S.A.S. could reorganize the population and build their own “parallel hierarchies” of control. Sheltered from the corrosive influence of the insurgents, the native populations could be re-indoctrinated. Local troops and native auxiliaries (self-defense forces, *harkis* and *maghzens*) could now defend the population more easily.

The appeal of the *regroupement* strategy, and its durability in the face of mounting evidence of its negative impact on the Muslim populations, rested on the both groups’ strongly held assumptions about the population. For the proponents of Model 1,

⁷²⁵ Ibid., Ageron, pp. 332-333.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., Ageron, pp. 359-360.

the population was an obstacle to traditional warfare and its removal from the battle space made possible a return to a conventional contest between armed groups. For proponents of Model 2, the population was centrally important but essentially Pavlovian. Based on their interpretation of the outcome in Indochina, these officers believed that the key to success in revolutionary war lay in the skillful manipulation of passive populations. The population's own preferences were either treated as benign (the desire for peace), malleable, or irrelevant. Pacification was treated as a mechanical problem not an ideological one. Organization and the skillful manipulation of incentives trumped internal preferences.

The official after action report on Operation Pilote, a year long pacification effort in the Oranais region (July 1957-August 1958), captures this awkward combination of apparent military success and political uncertainty.⁷²⁷ As the author of the report notes, the French objective was to build a new "political-administrative structure" (O.P.A.) in a 650 square mile region outside Oran. In the three months prior to the start of the operation, the local French commander had had a series of military successes against the guerillas. Having worn the FLN forces down, the French introduced a number of specialized units: loudspeaker and pamphlet companies, medical assistance teams, S.A.S. administrators, and youth counselors. Using re-educated insurgents as cadre,⁷²⁸ the French set about organizing the population and building a new O.P.A.

⁷²⁷ This account of Operation Pilote is drawn from Peter Paret's *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria*, pp. 80-92.

⁷²⁸ Another theme in GR theory was the use of brainwashing. Based on their experiences in Viet Minh camps, some French officers believed it was possible to re-educate natives to support the cause. The French invested significant sums in this re-education program with limited results (Source: Villatoux pp. 519-522).

Though the ostensible purpose of Operation Pilote was explicitly political rather than military, the summary of the results opened with a list of tangible military measures: 970 rebels killed, 2,099 captured, and 897 weapons recovered. The results of the “constructive” efforts were measured in terms of French performance of various activities: the French had set up self-defense forces in 50 villages, re-educated 60 village chiefs, and carried out numerous social projects from medical assistance to rural development. Yet, as the author of the report indicated, the lasting political effects of these French actions remained hard to pin down:

....the experiment [Operation Pilote] may be said to have been at least encouraging, if not conclusive. It is encouraging both in view of the results outlined above and in view of the atmosphere now existing in in that part of the area where the self-defending douars are sufficiently numerous. This atmosphere can be attested to by any visitor, and is further revealed by the amount of information the population furnishes. The experiment will be conclusive when, after the establishment of a sufficiently close-knit pattern of self-defending douars [villages] throughout the whole Pilot Area, we will progressively withdraw our troops – a move presently in its early stages – without the loyalty of the population wavering.⁷²⁹

This official report reveals the intrinsic measurement problems with Model 2 pacification. While the French had set out to build a durable political order in the region, they could not measure their political progress. Though they could point to the improved atmospherics and the scale (number of operations) and scope (administrative, social, economic and psychological) of their activities, the French had no way of knowing whether they had rallied the population. This was one of the leading paradoxes of the coercive model of pacification; while French forces were present, they could organize the population and suppress resistance. The success of those suppression efforts made it nearly impossible to measure the true opinion of the local population. Hence French could find very few valid leading or coincident indicators of political success.

⁷²⁹ Ibid., Paret, pp. 91-92.

However noble the intentions, Model 2 pacification often devolved into a brutal clash of arms that left the prize – the population – in tatters. What Salan's strategy lacked in large-scale maneuver, it more than made up for in the ferocity at the local level. While some local commanders placed a premium on improving relations with the populace,⁷³⁰ most continued to rely heavily on offensive, military tactics to compel the submission of the native population. French patrols and searches were used to net suspected insurgents, and commanders frequently resorted to harsh measures and collective responsibility in response to rebel advances. Mouloud Feraoun, an Algerian intellectual living in the Kabyle region, captured the escalating violence in a journal entry dated April 1957:

...there are maquis on the one hand, and on the other, there is the army. Between the two there is the population, which gets beaten up. Just like a punching ball between two boxers. The army severely rations, sweeps, destroys and kills. The rebels force themselves on the population, demanding lodging and protection. They also ransom and kill. Healthy men flee, go to jail, or join the maquis when they can escape death. The children, the women, and the old ones stay behind as punching bags.⁷³¹

While many Algerian observers deplored the brutal tactics of the insurgents, the net effect of the use of violence by the army and the guerillas was to shift the population's allegiance towards the rebels:

The maquis, now better armed and more numerous, are still enforcing the harsh punishment of hanging and cutting throats. The soldiers of pacification are hitting harder and harder, with less and less discrimination and pity. The clearest result of all this is, I believe, planting a definitive hatred for the French in the hearts of the Kabyles. The French refuse to realize this and seem to forget the evil they sow at the very moment when, after finishing one strike, they are already preparing to deal other blows.⁷³²

⁷³⁰ The history of the 584th Battalion suggests that success in winning hearts and minds could flow from a scrupulous attention to fairness and legality combined with a willingness on the part of the French command to accept risk. This "liberal" approach was not without cost, however. Several members of Major Pouget's command group, including his intelligence officer and a volunteer school teacher, were assassinated by F.L.N. guerillas from other areas. Though the local inhabitants promptly handed over the assassins, the killings highlighted the costs of restraint and civic action (Source: Alexander Zervoudakis, "A Case of Successful Pacification: The 584th Battalion du Train at Bordj de l'Agha," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Volume 25, No. 2, June 2002, pp. 54-64).

⁷³¹ Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962, Reflections on the French-Algerian War*, trans. and ed., Mary Ellen Wolf, Claude Fouillade, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), pp. 201.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, Feraoun, pp. 240.

While the army believed that the struggle for the population was carried out on level ground, the French paid a disproportionate and largely unrecognized political price for the crescendo of violence in the Algerian interior.

Pursuit: Operational innovations

Though Salan had made pacification his priority, the army continued to make major advances in the pursuit mission. Building on early war experiments, commanders sought to improve the mobility and precision of their units. The two major innovations of the period –improved targeting intelligence and air mobility - made the theater reserve ever more effective at locating and dispatching major ALN units.

One of the chief obstacles to early French operations in Algeria had been a lack of precise targeting intelligence. In part this was the product of the Byzantine intelligence organization of the prewar period and early moves to centralize intelligence began to show benefits in the 1956 and 1957.⁷³³ The increasing density of French troops in the countryside gave local and theater commanders an improved picture of the Algerian interior. Additionally, Salan's organization of local populations and native auxiliaries gave the command more effective tools for locating and attacking the guerillas and the O.P.A.. The collection and exploitation of human intelligence fell to the newly established D.O.P. (*dispositifs opérationnels de protection*): joint army/police interrogation teams that were the direct descendants of Aussaresses' improvised units in Algiers.⁷³⁴ So integral were these teams to French operations that David Galula, one of

⁷³³ Ibid., Faivre, *Le Renseignement dans la guerre d'Algérie*, pp. 19-20.

⁷³⁴ Ibid., Peyroulou, pp.176-177; *ibid.*, Faivre, pp. 161-163.

the leading practitioners of Model 2 pacification, identified the D.O.P. as the single most important innovation of the war.⁷³⁵

These organizational changes and increased troop density produced major advances in targeting. As late as November 1956, a mere 15% of French operations had been launched in response to specific intelligence leads. Under these conditions, French units had to hope that encirclements would catch the rebels more or less by chance. By May 1957, this percentage had grown to 50%.⁷³⁶ Though the intelligence network was no closer to answering the central question – the permanence of its pacification gains – it had built a machine capable of reliably producing large numbers of targets for the mobile forces. This imbalance between targeting and the measurement of political progress would dog the French command for the rest of the war.

The elite forces of the theater reserve continued their quest for mobility. Following the lead of Ducournau and Bigeard, the commanders of the airborne and Foreign Legion units had discarded much of the heavy equipment in order to match the mobility of their quarry. As Bigeard famously quipped, he hoped his training would “transform our officers into veritable *fellagha* [guerillas] for our side.”⁷³⁷ In this same spirit, French commanders began experiments with the use of light, dismounted units composed of mixed French and Algerian scouts. Bigeard’s commando Georges, built around a core of turned FLN insurgents, combined nomadisation with the benefits of native scouting. This unit served as the prototype for the commandos de chasse of the later Challe offensives.

⁷³⁵ Ibid., Galula, pp. 183-184.

⁷³⁶ Olivier Hamon, “Chronique du conflit algérien 1954-1962,” *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 187 (juin 1992), pp. 39.

⁷³⁷ Général Marcel Bigeard, *Ma guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 2003), pp. 98.

The most significant change in French pursuit operations was the introduction of helicopters. In early 1956, Bigeard had used helicopters to lift multiple paratrooper companies into the hitherto impassable regions of the interior.⁷³⁸ These platforms gave the elite units enormous mobility without many of the disadvantages inherent in traditional parachute operations. The growing availability of airframes from 1956 on led to a rapid expansion in the use of helicopter operations.⁷³⁹ For the first time in the war, the French were able to combine their advantages in air mobility and close air support with greatly improved dismounted mobility. By negating the guerillas' mobility advantage, these innovations gave the French a decisive edge over their more lightly armed opponents.

The GR Backlash: Warriors vs. Psychologists

In spite of Salan's efforts to convince them of the importance of psychological operations, a significant portion of the French officer corps resisted the introduction of Model 2 strategies. On one level, this was a response to the exaggerated claims of psychological warfare experts. On a deeper level, it was a fundamental rejection of Model 2 and its emphasis on the population. What was striking about this late war debate was the lack of interest in Model 3 alternatives. In the presence of abundant military resources, tactical success and military control over counterinsurgency strategy, the search for strategic alternatives was an internal dialogue in which the choices were limited to Models 1 and 2.

⁷³⁸ These air assault operations, referred to as Operations 744 and 962, are described in detail in Marcel Bigeard's *Pour une parcelle de gloire* (Paris: Editions°1, 1997), pp. 220-228.

⁷³⁹ Pierre-Louis Garnier, "La guerre d'Algérie et la consecration de l'ALAT," *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 229 (December 2002), pp. 19, fn 4.

David Galula aptly summarized the philosophical differences between the two camps and their divergent answers to the problem of counterinsurgency:

In my zone, as everywhere in Algeria, the order was to “pacify.” But exactly how? The sad truth was that, in spite of all our past experience, we had no single, official doctrine for counterinsurgency warfare. Instead, there were various schools of thought, all unofficial, some highly vociferous. While the majority of cadres lived in an intellectual vacuum, waiting for precise orders from above and meanwhile performing the routine combat tasks for which they had been trained all their lives, these different schools of thought were championed by minorities. At one extreme stood the warriors, officer who had learned nothing, who challenged the very idea that the population was the real objective, who maintained that military action pursued with sufficient means and vigor for a sufficiently long time would defeat the rebels. They needed just one more regiment, or battalion, or company to do the trick....At the other extreme were the psychologists, most of them recruited among officers who had undergone the Vietminh brainwashing in prisoner camps. To them, psychological action was the answer to everything, not merely the simple propaganda and psychological warfare adjunct to other types of operations, conventional or otherwise. “You use force against the enemy,” one of their leaders told me, “not so much to destroy him but in order to make him change his mind on the necessity of pursuing the fight. In other words, you do a psychological action.” They were convinced that the population could be manipulated through certain techniques adapted from communist methods.⁷⁴⁰

The clash that Galula describes was played out in print and in the field. In the *Revue de Defense Nationale* and the *Revue Militaire d'Information*, the rival factions presented critiques and solutions that sprang from rival assumptions about the significance and role of the population. For the warriors, all talk of the population and psychological operations had obscured an intrinsically military struggle in which the prize was the rival army. For the psychologists, the key was either psychological operations or some form of Vietminh style population control.

Results: Episodic success and campaign stalemate

By end of his tenure in December 1958, Salan had stopped the slide in French fortunes. Entering on the heels of the Suez debacle and the Ben Bella affaire, he had overseen the victory in Algiers and the Battle of the Frontiers. After 1957, the FLN was

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., Galula, pp. 64-65.

unable to exert pressure in the major urban areas of the coast. After 1958, the ALN inside Algeria was cut off from its base areas in Tunisia and Morocco. With the mounting pressure of improved French pacification and pursuit operations, the ALN began to shift from offensive operations to defensive ones and finally to the desperation tactic of dispersion.

The impact of Salan's new model of pacification proved as difficult to measure as his earlier efforts in the Red River delta of Tonkin. The tangible measures of performance were uniformly positive. The number of FLN killed in 1957 (32,088) was nearly double that of 1956 (16,553).⁷⁴¹ For the first time in the rebellion, the growth of the ALN forces inside Algeria had begun to plateau at around 20,000. Equally important, the number of attacks had fallen from a monthly peak of 3,988 in January 1957 to an average of 1,748 over the following two years of his tenure.⁷⁴² From 1954 through his arrival December 1956, all these trends had been negative. By the end of 1958, Salan had stabilized the situation. On the other hand, valid and reliable measures of public support remained elusive. While Salan could point to rapid increases in French investments – S.A.S. expansions, civic action projects, etc. – he could not specify their effect on the ultimate objective – the restoration of French authority.

Salan had brought France to a new and costly plateau. Though rebel strength and activity had fallen, even limited stabilization had required over 400,000 troops and sizable economic investments. If Salan could not find a way to rollback the FLN, then the French would be forced to maintain this state of martial law indefinitely.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., Pervillé, *Pour une histoire de la guerre d'Algérie*, pp. 176.

⁷⁴² The data on number of FLN attacks is drawn from *ibid.*, Connelly, pp. 292.

Phase 4: The Challe Offensives

The next change in French strategy was the product of political upheaval and military stalemate. The fall of the Fourth Republic in the spring of 1958 and the arrival of Charles de Gaulle brought major changes in policy and personnel. He quickly replaced General Salan and restored the traditional division of authority between a new civilian Governor General, Paul Delouvrier, and a military commander, General Challe. While de Gaulle had restored some measure of civilian control, he left the development of military strategy to the army. The resulting Challe Plan retained many of the Model 2 elements of his predecessor Salan, but reintroduced the Model 1 elements of mass and large scale maneuver.

Challe's rolling offensives of 1959-1960 dealt a nearly fatal blow to the ALN inside Algeria. The crescendo of violence in the countryside set up a clash of interpretation. The military leadership, measuring progress in terms of military results and coercive population control, saw the offensives proof of imminent victory. The civilian leadership under de Gaulle saw the same results quite differently. The extreme methods and enormous resources used to suppress the rebellion convinced de Gaulle of the futility of the Model 2 strategy. While the army continued to pursue a strategy of total war, de Gaulle began to adjust his political aims to accommodate some form of Algerian self-determination.

Sakiet, Operation Resurrection, and the Fall of the Fourth Republic

Though the Battle of the Frontiers had a far larger impact on the military fortunes of the FLN, it was a border incident at Sakiet Sidi Youssef in February 1957 that set in

motion the collapse of the Fourth Republic. The military's bombing of this Tunisian border town in response to ALN cross border attacks fatally undermined the weak French government. Beset by international outcry over civilian casualties and military outrage over the lack of support by civil leaders, the government in Paris began a policy retreat that would end in a joint revolt by the settler community and the army. That quasi- coup of May 1958 would end with the installation of De Gaulle and the birth of the Fifth Republic.

The high command saw the retaliatory raid on Sakiet as part of a larger campaign against the FLN's external sponsors. The revolt in Algeria depended on the flow of men and materials from base areas in Morocco and Tunisia. Salan feared that if the ALN were allowed to operate from those areas with impunity, then the French would be unable to defeat the FLN. The ALN's decision to launch raids from Sakiet, and the Tunisian government's unwillingness or inability to intervene, made a demonstration of French resolve and capability critically important.

What the military considered just retaliation, the Tunisian government and international community saw as an act of aggression. Though the newly independent Tunisian government had repeatedly offered to act as a mediator between the FLN and the French authorities, the bombing of Tunisian civilians and the subsequent acts by French forces stationed inside Tunisia led President Bourguiba to throw his weight behind the FLN. The Eisenhower administration, which saw the Algerian war as a painful replay of the Indochina disaster, sought to use the Sakiet incident to force a negotiated settlement. Faced with the interruption of U.S. financial support for its fragile

domestic economy, the French government under Prime Ministers Gaillard and Pflimlin accepted the American offer of “good offices.”

The French government’s backtracking enraged the army and the settlers. The army saw the government’s actions as a betrayal of the military command and a threat to the entire war effort. In a thinly veiled threat to the civil government, General Salan wrote to the Army Chief of Staff, General Ely, that recent policy decisions might trigger a revolt by the army:

The present crisis shows that the political parties are profoundly divided over the Algerian question. The press permits one to think that the abandonment of Algeria would be envisaged in the diplomatic processes which would begin with negotiations aiming at a cease-fire.... The Army in Algeria is troubled by recognition of its responsibility towards the men who are fighting and risking a useless sacrifice if the representatives of the nation are not determined to maintain *Algérie française*.... The French army, in its unanimity, would feel outraged by the abandonment of this national patrimony. One cannot predict how it would react in despair....⁷⁴³

The incoming Pflimlin government’s discussion of a cease-fire,⁷⁴⁴ and the FLN’s decision to execute three French POWs, ignited the settler community. Mass demonstrations in Algiers on May 13, 1958 led to the seizure of the major government buildings and the declaration of a Committee for Public Safety under the leadership of Generals Salan and Massu. Unable to control events from Paris, the Gaillard government granted Salan unified civil and military powers in Algeria.⁷⁴⁵

Once in power, the Salan and the Committee called for the return of de Gaulle⁷⁴⁶ from his self-imposed political exile. While de Gaulle considered his return, General

⁷⁴³ Général Salan to Général Ely, 9 May 1957 as cited in *ibid.*, Horne, pp. 282. The complete French language text is available in *ibid.*, Salan, pp. 285-286.

⁷⁴⁴ George Armstrong Kelly, *Lost Soldiers: The French Army and Empire in Crisis, 1947-1962* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965), pp. 212.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Kelly, pp. 224.

⁷⁴⁶ Philip Williams, “How the French Republic Died: Sources for the Revolution of May 1958,” *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring, 1963), pp. 21.

Massu began to plan a military seizure of power in Paris, Operation Resurrection.⁷⁴⁷ The first stage of the operation involved the seizure of Corsica. On May 24, 1958, French forces under Colonel Thomazo arrived in Corsica and seized power with the help of local Gaullists. The Pflimlin government's inability to mount any response to this bloodless coup sealed the fate of the Fourth Republic.⁷⁴⁸ Unable to control its own military, the government under President Coty and Prime Minister Pflimlin approached de Gaulle. An ambivalent de Gaulle accepted this offer in order to preempt the execution of the second phase of Operation Resurrection – the French military's planned seizure of power in Paris.⁷⁴⁹

Stalemate and the Search for Victory

While the coming of de Gaulle was the proximate cause of the change in military leadership and strategy, this shock came in the context of mounting impatience in military circles. Salan's victories in Algiers and in the Battle of the Frontiers and the reversal of the major military trends had kindled hopes of military victory. Yet, for all his success in stopping the spread of the rebellion, Salan had not found a way to roll it back. Salan's onetime sponsor and advocate of psychological operations, French army chief of Staff General Ely, lamented his subordinate's dispersal of forces and failure to pursue the offensive.⁷⁵⁰ French civilian leaders, including Defense Minister Chaban-

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., Horne, pp. 294.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., Williams, pp. 28, 31; *ibid.*, Horne, pp. 295.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., Williams, pp. 34.

⁷⁵⁰ Général Maurice Faivre, "Le Plan Challe," *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 238 (mars 2005), pp. 109; Andre-Paul Comor, "Le général Ely et la guerre d'Algérie," *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 229 (décembre 2002), pp. 91.

Delmas, publicly urged a more offensive strategy for victory over the rebels.⁷⁵¹ As French confidence, expectations and impatience advanced in lock step, the military was ready for a change in strategy.

Carrots then sticks: The Constantine Plan and the “Paix des Braves” (September 1958-January 1959)

While de Gaulle had broken the French military’s monopoly on strategy and policy in Algeria, he did little to intrude on the search for a new military strategy. Though he shared the impatience of other military and civilian leaders,⁷⁵² de Gaulle left the development of that strategy to his new military commander, General Challe. Having set the goal of rapid victory, and floated several tentative alternatives to military escalation, de Gaulle withdrew from the management of military operations. Given a free hand to reshape counterinsurgency strategy, Challe forged a new and more vigorous plan for near term victory. While he retained many of Salan’s Model 2 strategies, Challe’s concept rested on military escalation and the reintroduction of large scale maneuver.

De Gaulle’s first contributions to strategy came in the form of carrots not sticks. Buoyed by the seemingly overwhelming mandate of the September 26 referendum on his proposed constitution for the Fifth Republic,⁷⁵³ de Gaulle sought to bring the rebellion to an end by offering a combination of economic development and individual and collective

⁷⁵¹ The French Minister of Defense, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, made the following expression of his impatience in an April 1957 press conference: “I have always insisted on the need to systematically increase the mobility of our troops, and thus to reinforce the offensive character and spirit of the units. It is necessary that the largest possible number of them be engaged in the hunting down the rebel bands and not simply waiting for them. The defensive is not sufficient, it is the offensive that leads to success and nothing else.” (Source: *ibid.*, Salan, pp. 267)

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, Salan, pp. 382.

⁷⁵³ Voter turnout in Algeria was 79.9% with 96.6% of those registering votes in favor of de Gaulle. Not surprisingly, there was evidence of the military’s use of the D.P.U. structure to drive voter turnout and behavior (Source: Horne, pp. 305).

amnesty. In his speech in Constantine on October 3, 1958, de Gaulle outlined an ambitious plan for French investment and development in Algeria that included large scale job creation, land reform, wage increases, public education, and affirmative action in civil administration.⁷⁵⁴ The intent of all these measures was to improve the standard of living and political status of the Muslim population.

Three weeks later, de Gaulle offered the FLN a *paix des braves* – or peace of the brave. Drawing on his reputation for military rectitude, de Gaulle offered to amnesty all those FLN fighters who approached under a flag of truce and surrendered their weapons. To reinforce his point, de Gaulle released some 13,000 prisoners over the course of 1959 as a gesture of goodwill and as an invitation to wholesale surrenders.⁷⁵⁵

In spite of de Gaulle's considerable political momentum, his conciliatory offers fell flat.⁷⁵⁶ The FLN categorically rejected the *paix des braves* offer.⁷⁵⁷ General Challe, writing in 1962, observed that the amnesty offer was sensible but premature;⁷⁵⁸ so long as the enemy had the means to resist, he had no reason to submit. Similarly, there is little evidence that the prisoner releases of 1959 stimulated either individual surrenders or political reconciliation on the elite level.⁷⁵⁹

While many individuals and communities did benefit from the Constantine Plan, the logical connection between late war civic action and resistance behavior appears to have been quite weak. While few in the French camp doubted that political and economic inequality had given the FLN cause its basic appeal, the belated provision of

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., Droz, Lever, pp. 197-198.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., Horne, 306; *ibid.*, Droz, Lever, pp. 205.

⁷⁵⁶ Jacques Soustelle, *L'espérance trahie (1958-1961)* (Paris: Éditions d'Alma, 1962), pp. 88-89.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., Thénault, pp. 169; *ibid.*, Connelly, pp. 197.

⁷⁵⁸ Maurice Challe, *Notre Révolte* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1968), pp. 37.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., Soustelle, *L'espérance trahie*, pp. 89.

investments and reforms did not turn back the clock. Reforms and investments that might have dampened nationalist sentiment between 1945 and 1954 were not strong enough to independently restore a polity shattered by three years of large scale violence.

From Carrots to Sticks: The Challe Offensives (February 1959-March 1960)

Within a week of his appointment as the senior military commander in Algeria,⁷⁶⁰ General Challe announced a new plan for victory. While Challe acknowledged Salan's accomplishments in sealing the borders and developing *quadrillage*, he argued that the French army had lacked a comprehensive plan for the employment of the theater reserve. If the French could use the theater reserve to smash the ALN bands in their mountain sanctuaries, then it might be possible to restore durable control in countryside. Once these areas had been cleared, Challe would apply new methods of "dynamic" *quadrillage* to reach Challe's goal of "bringing the population in its entirety under our control."⁷⁶¹

Many of the building blocks for this strategy were already in place. Salan's success in reducing border infiltration had made Algeria, in Challe's words, "a closed battlefield."⁷⁶² The Battle of the Frontiers in early 1958 had demonstrated the operational improvements in tactical intelligence, the use of helicopter borne infantry, and close air support. Though they represented just over ten percent of the French troops in the Algerian theater,⁷⁶³ the elite units of the theater Reserve had proven their ability to track

⁷⁶⁰ General Ely had dispatched Challe to Algeria two months earlier to serve as Salan's adjutant. Challe had formed many of his basic ideas on counterinsurgency strategy during this period and was prepared to issue his Directive No. 1 as soon as he assumed command in late December 1958 (Sources:[Abzac article, pp. 64]; *ibid.*, Challe, pp. 37-38).

⁷⁶¹ "Directive du 22 décembre 1958 aux forces terrestres, aériennes, et maritimes" in *ibid.*, Challe, pp. 96.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, Challe, pp.

⁷⁶³ In April 1959, the theater or "general" reserve numbered 50,000 out of a total force of 425,000 French troops (Source: Jean-Charles Jauffret, "Une armée à deux vitesses en Algérie (1954-1962): Réserves

down and destroy ALN units in almost any terrain. On the pacification front, Salan had already put in place a comprehensive structure for population control. S.A.S.

detachments had begun to develop a French O.P.A. and apply the psychological tools advocated by the GR theorists. Equally important, expanded resettlement of the Muslim population had simplified the problems of population defense and control.

Though he intended to use many of Salan's tools, Challe believed that his predecessor's lack a comprehensive scheme of maneuver had limited the effectiveness of pursuit and pacification.⁷⁶⁴ Challe planned instead to concentrate this theater reserve for a series of offensive operations. Starting in the less restive areas of the west and rolling eastward, Challe would apply the full strength of the theater reserve to each enemy sanctuary area in turn. His objective in each area was to wear the enemy down to a level where the local *quadrillage* troops could hold the area and consolidate French control.⁷⁶⁵ During the clearance phase, local units were to use their superior knowledge of the local area to focus the offensive operations of the theater reserve.⁷⁶⁶

After roughly one to three months of "treatment" by the theater reserve, the sector would revert to the control of local forces. Local commanders would then employ some mix of S.A.S. action, resettlement, and deliberate organization of the population to ensure tight control. Though Challe shared his predecessor's focus on population control, his pacification strategy emphasized targeting and control over purely psychological operations.

générales et troupes de secteur," in *ibid.*, Jauffret, Vaïsse, *Militaires et guérilla dans la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 2001), pp. 23).

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Challe, pp. 39.

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Challe, pp.

⁷⁶⁶ François-Marie Gougeon, "The Challe Plan: Vain Yet Indispensable Victory," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 302.

Challe's most significant operational innovation was the *commandos de chasse* (hunting commandos). Building on Salan's earlier efforts,⁷⁶⁷ Challe used mixed companies of Algerian and French troops to add a dynamic element to what had been a largely static, pacification strategy.⁷⁶⁸ In each local area, the French would form a *commando* to shadow the opposing *katiba* (company). The *commandos* would then employ range of tactics to hound their quarry; as Challe put it, they were not to break the rebels but to mark them.⁷⁶⁹ In some cases the commandos would set up observation posts of the high ground in a sector and then direct artillery, aviation, or reserve units to engage the unsuspecting ALN bands. In other instances, the commandos would pose as ALN guerillas.⁷⁷⁰ These "carnival" operations, enabled the French to surprise the guerillas and test the true sentiments of the population. As in the case of Léger's more elaborate *bleuite* operations in *wilaya* III, the discovery of false guerilla bands bred suspicion and sparked self-destructive purges.⁷⁷¹ The ultimate objective of the *commandos de chasse* was to make the guerillas as insecure as possible, limiting their offensive capability, breaking their hold on the population, and preventing their resurgence once the theater reserve had moved on.

Challe decision reliance on the *commandos de chasse* was a product of judgment and material constraint. Early French enthusiasm for such units, in some cases dating to the Indochina period, rested on a belief that native troops were often better suited than

⁷⁶⁷ Général Maurice Faivre, "Le plan Challe," *Revue historique des armées*, No. 238 (March 2005), pp. 109; Claude d'Abzac-Epezy, François Pernot, "Les opérations en Algérie décembre 1958-avril 1960: Le général Challe parle," *Revue historique des armées*, No. 200 (septembre 1995), pp. 67; Le Mire, pp. 275.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., Le Mire, pp. 257.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., Abzac, pp. 67.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., Faivre, *Le Renseignement dans la guerre d'Algérie*, pp. 163.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., Villatoux, pp. 516-517.

French troops to the task of pacification.⁷⁷² “Turned” ALN insurgents in the commandos units were more adept at locating and eliminating their former associates. Equally important, however, was the pressure to substitute local manpower for French troops. While the French had managed to maintain roughly 400,000 troops in Algeria between 1957 and 1958, the French government had decided in late 1958 to revoke the extensions in conscript service that had made this possible. In his initial directive to his commanders on December 19, 1958, Challe emphasized that the resulting loss of between 40,000 and 50,000 troops⁷⁷³ made the use of far larger numbers of Muslim troops imperative:

In order to push these tasks forward, we find ourselves facing the problems resulting from the reduction in [French military] forces. The extension of the length of service having been terminated by the government, the maintenance of our potential must be found through the maximal utilization of the F.S.N.A. [French of North African origin] and by through the improved efficiency in the use of our available means. The use of the F.S.N.A. is first of all a moral imperative. We will not pacify the Algerians without the Algerians. Secondly, this is a guarantee of [greater] effectiveness. The best hunter of *fellaghas* is an F.S.N.A. [a Frenchman of North African descent]. Finally, this is a necessity in if we are to limit the fall in troop numbers.⁷⁷⁴

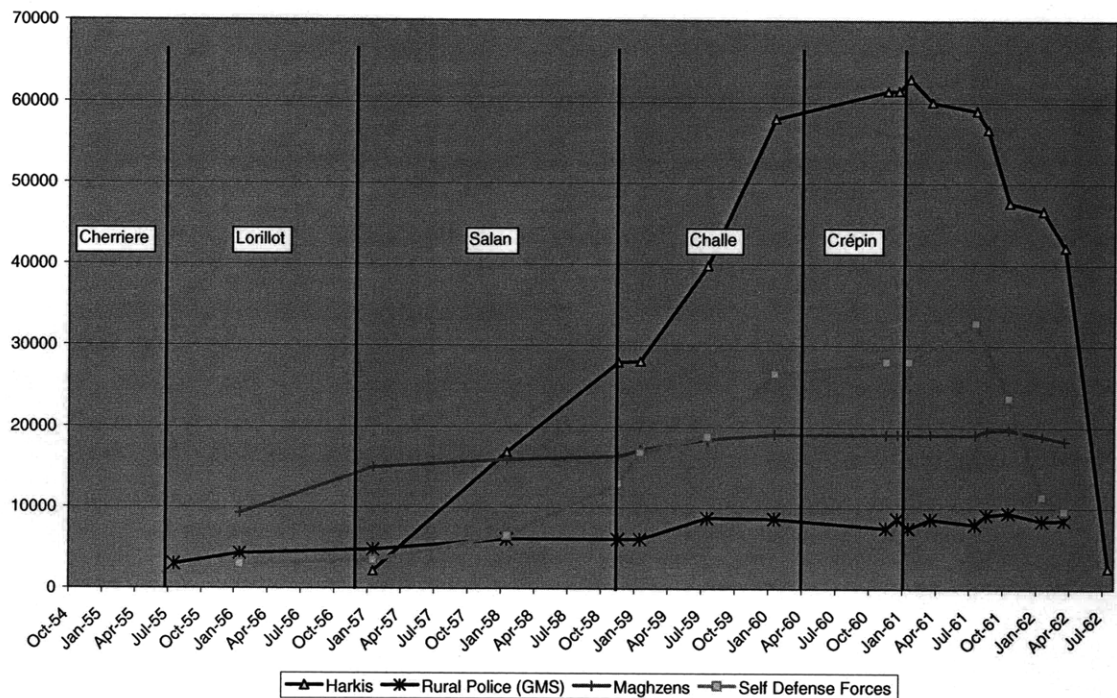
Challe was true to his word. As the table below indicates, Challe’s push for increased Muslim participation drove the numbers of *harkis*, *commandos de chasse*, *maghzen* and self-defense forces up dramatically. By the end of his tenure, the proportion of Muslim combatants in the Algerian garrison had risen to one in three.

⁷⁷² Ibid., Abzac, pp. 64.

⁷⁷³ Ibid., Faivre, pp. 109.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid., Challe, pp. 99.

Muslim Forces in French Service



Challe launched the first of his operations on February 6, 1959, just over a month after his assumption of command. Operation Oranie targeted the weakest FLN region, *wilaya* V. Within the space of one month, Challe's theater reserves, local units, and commandos had cut F.L.N. manpower in the region by 50% (1,600 killed in action, 460 captured) and captured between 40% and 50% of the rebels' weaponry.⁷⁷⁵ By March, the regional commander, General Gambiez, ordered a shift from clearance operations to the conquest of the population.⁷⁷⁶

Confident that Oranie had proven the basic formula, Challe marched east into the more strongly held FLN redoubts. Over the course of Operations Courroie (18 April-19 June 1959), Etincelle (8-20 July 1959), Operation Jumelles (22 July 1959-8 April 1960), and Pierres Précieuses (6 September 1959-August 1960), Challe pushed his ever larger

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid., Horne, pp. 334.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., Faivre, "Le plan Challe," pp. 111.

theater reserve through the remaining FLN sanctuaries. The impact of these offensives on an ALN weakened by internal purges and cut off from its external bases was devastating. Four of the six ALN regional commanders were killed, and in 1959 alone the ALN suffered an estimated 26,339 dead.⁷⁷⁷ The number of regular ALN fighters inside Algeria dropped from its 1958 level of roughly 20,000 to somewhere between 5,000 and 7,000 by the end of 1961.⁷⁷⁸ The drop in the number of *katibas* (ALN companies) was even more striking; whereas the ALN fielded 121 *katibas* in August 1958, that number had fallen to 8 by July 1961.⁷⁷⁹ Without access to new weapons and ammunition, the *katibas* had broken into progressively smaller bands to survive the French offensives.

Though most of the estimates of the ALN losses come from French military sources, contemporary ALN accounts reinforce this impression of near military collapse. As one F.L.N. leader in the Kabylia recalled, the Challe offensives reduced the insurgents to desperation:

One could no longer move...One no longer ate. I was so weak that I could no longer even manage to carry my own sub-machine gun. The establishment of military posts, the multiplying of self-defense communities and intelligence agents was making life impossible, and even survival itself....It was only by executing traitors one after the other that we did manage to survive. But one was never able to regain the initiative.⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid., Faivre, "Le plan Challe," pp. 114.

⁷⁷⁸ Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire Intérieure du FLN* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), pp. 304.

⁷⁷⁹ Maurice Faivre, *Les combattants musulmans de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), pp. 265.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., Horne, pp. 336.

Challe's not only shattered the ALN units, but also put in place significant barriers to rebel resurgence. The combination of border control, *commandos de chasse*, and S.A.S. organization made it nearly impossible for the ALN to reassert control in the cleared areas. As Challe pointed out, "The rebel was no longer the king of the djebel: he was now the hunted."⁷⁸¹

Split interpretation: Military and Civilian Perspectives on Challe Offensives

In strictly military terms, the Challe plan was a resounding success. Writing after the war, Challe pointed to several tangible indicators of his success: increasing body counts, decreasing ALN strength and unit size, and declining ALN willingness to attack.⁷⁸² From a Model 1 perspective, the armed forces of the FLN inside Algeria were nearly spent by the time of Challe's departure in March 1960.

To Challe's credit, he recognized that Algeria was a political war. Challe noted that many general officers and politicians in France at the time saw the struggle in entirely conventional terms:

"You, the military leaders, you win the war on the ground and we, the political leaders, we will make the peace and we will set the political conditions." To which I replied: "This is not a war – I do not consider myself Napoleon and neither are we at Austerlitz – we find ourselves in a political war and it is a political war that we will win or we will lose."⁷⁸³

Challe clearly rejected the sequential logic of the Model 1: the idea that wars were first won in decisive battle and then delivered to the politicians. In sharp contrast, he argued that, at least in revolutionary war, politics and war could not be disentangled. While Challe had broken with Model 1 orthodoxy, his discussion reveals his commitment to Model 2's coercive definition of politics. Control of the population was the central

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., Challe, pp.

⁷⁸² General Maurice Challe as cited in *ibid.*, Abzac-Epezy, François Pernot, pp. 70.

⁷⁸³ General Maurice Challe as cited in *ibid.*, Abzac-Epezy, François Pernot, pp. 64.

objective of the war, and the only way to succeed was to separate the passive population from the virulent rebel influence: “The rebel had, at that moment [when he refused to engage the French forces], lost, not because we had bludgeoned him, but because we had cut him off from the population.”⁷⁸⁴

Challe went on to cite the resettlement of the rural populations in 1,000 “new villages” and the public works investments of the Constantine Plan as evidence of the political transformation of Algeria:

Therefore, in this pacification, we had put in place a immense public works project and, as the results of military operations and pacification went hand in hand, we had, I can say, won the political war at the moment where the population rejected the rebels....I have told you what we did to separate the rebels from the population and the population accepted it.⁷⁸⁵

Challe had perfectly summarized the Model 2 theory of victory. By his telling, the army had won by beating the guerillas and bribing or beguiling a passive population. As such, it was a vision of one-way politics in which the application of positive and negative incentives was sufficient to restore the state’s authority. As Paul and Catherine Villatoux have noted that the theory of *guerre révolutionnaire* rested on this assumption of a passive population and foreign agitation:

By asserting the principle that the rebellion was simply the poisoned fruit of disruptive elements, the theoreticians of *la guerre révolutionnaire* logically conceived of the rallying of populations, not in terms of a complete reversal, but as a simple return of these masses to the French bosom, previously abused or terrorized by the agents of a foreign power. It is in this way that the Muslim population was always described as a mass, amorphous, wavering, of a “primitive character” and “highly emotional,” within which only “a limited number of individuals” were “capable of reasoned judgment.”⁷⁸⁶

Just as Salan and Trinquier had cited Muslim turnout in the September 1958 constitutional referendum as proof of the power of psychological operations, Challe and other Model 2 leaders believed that an authoritarian order built on forced resettlement

⁷⁸⁴ General Maurice Challe as cited in *ibid.*, Abzac-Epezy, François Pernot, pp. 70.

⁷⁸⁵ General Maurice Challe as cited in *ibid.*, Abzac-Epezy, François Pernot, pp. 70.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Villatoux, pp. 489.

was proof of political success. Viewed through the Model 2 lens, political control was synonymous with political success. So long as that population was inanimate and reprogrammable, then its political preferences were largely irrelevant.

The Regroupements Crisis and the White Terror: Civilian Objections to the Challe Plan

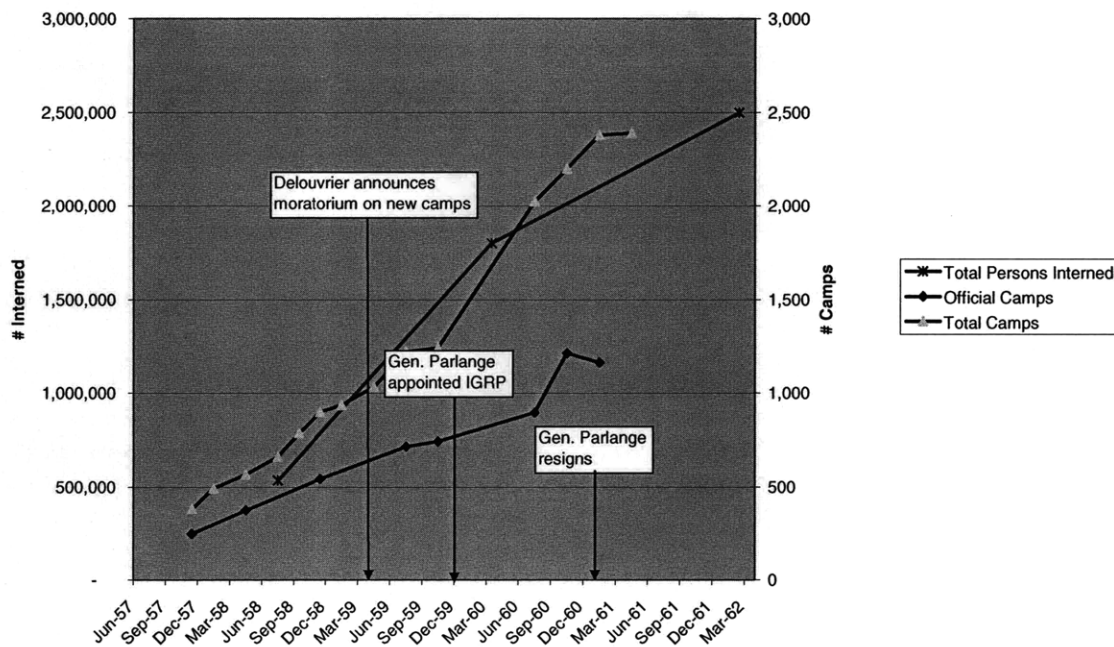
While Challe was confident that he had all but won the war, other observers expressed doubts about the Challe/Constantine package of sticks and carrots. Since the objective of the campaign was to restore a free standing, civil order, everything rested on the ability of the French to connect their military, economic and psychological operations to this goal. Two major themes undermined Challe's claims: the political costs of pacification and the incomplete or impermanent nature of French population control.

Challe's most important pacification tool was resettlement. Eager to clear the countryside and establish positive control over rural populations, he endorsed a massive expansion of the resettlement program. As the chart below indicates, the number of Algerians in official and unofficial resettlements climbed from 360,000 (~4% of the total Muslim population of 9 million) in November 1957 to over 1,660,514 in October 1960 (~20% of the Muslim population).⁷⁸⁷ The military saw aggressive resettlement as indispensable. As General Crépin, Challe's successor as French commander in Algeria, put it in April 1960, "We will not be able to win the war unless we win the battle of the *regroupements*."⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁷ All data on regroupement figures is drawn from Charles-Robert Ageron, "Une dimension de la guerre d'Algérie: Les regroupements de populations," in Jauffret, Vaïsse, *Militaires et guérilla dans la guerre d'Algérie*, pp. 327-362.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., Ageron, pp. 341.

Regroupement Policy (1957-1962)



The results of *regroupement* were mixed. The isolation of the guerillas from their support base clearly contributed to the collapse of resistance during the Challe offensives. Similarly, the creation of “free fire” zones greatly simplified the pursuit of the remaining guerillas. On the other hand, the French failed to persuade the resettled populations that the new order was an improvement. From the outset, the military’s eagerness to intern Algerians outstripped its ability to provide housing, food, and sanitation. In 1960, a full three years into the policy, Algerians interned in the Akbou sector were receiving an average of 1 kg of rice flour per person per month whereas their nutritional needs approached 7 kg/person/month.⁷⁸⁹ Unemployment, malnutrition, disease, and infant mortality were rampant in the camps, and these pressures drove Algerian into the arms of the F.L.N. rather than the French authorities. Of the 600 nomads in one S.A.S. survey,

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., Ageron, pp. 345.

68% refused to answer whether they would accept resettlement and another 20% answered that they would not resettle.⁷⁹⁰ Far from representing a coup for French psychological operations, the *regroupement* camps had become breeding grounds for future generations of Algerian insurgents.⁷⁹¹

French civilian authorities soon recognized the potential for strategic disaster. In response to growing reports of deprivation in camps, Governor-General, Paul Delouvrier, announced on March 31, 1959, the “suspension of all new *regroupements*”⁷⁹² and a renewed emphasis on addressing problems in existing settlements. To focus these efforts, Delouvrier appointed the S.A.S. general, Georges Parlange, Inspector General for Resettlement.⁷⁹³ In one of his first reports, Parlange indicated that the displacement of the rural populations approached “total ruin” for the affected parties and that the French policy must help over one million “remake their lives and rediscover their former way of life.”⁷⁹⁴

The French military resisted Delouvrier and Parlange’s efforts to rein in *regroupement*. Challe immediately protested Delouvrier’s encroachment into the military’s war on the guerillas. While acknowledging the regrettable human consequences of *regroupement*, military leaders emphasized military necessity and the positive accomplishments of the program (expanded access to health care and education). The indirect resistance to Delouvrier and Parlange’s initiatives was more significant. As the *regroupement* statistics show, Delouvrier’s moratorium and his appointment of Parlange did nothing to stem the growth of official and unofficial camps. Local

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., Ageron, pp. 347.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., Ageron, pp. 346.

⁷⁹² Ibid., Ageron, pp. 340.

⁷⁹³ Ibid., Ageron, pp. 340.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., Ageron, pp. 340.

commanders, with the tacit support of the high command, simply ignored the directives of the civil government or couched the new resettlements in different terms.⁷⁹⁵ In spite of the best efforts of the civil administration and S.A.S. leadership to articulate the growing short and long term costs of the *regroupement* programs, the French military pursued expanded resettlement from 1957 through the end of offensive operations in 1961.

General Parlange, recognizing his inability to influence *regroupement* policy, resigned his post in December 1960. In his final report, he underlined his conviction that the policy would have disastrous consequences for French political-military strategy in Algeria:

It is imperative that we unwind the resettlements at every opportunity. Otherwise, we will face an irreparable failure that could wipe out all of the political, military, and economic efforts undertaken in the past five years.⁷⁹⁶

More than any other aspect of the French counterinsurgent strategy, the division between the French military command and the civil authorities on *regroupement* revealed the underlying philosophical gap between the two communities. Challe and the military command were aware of the mixed effects of their strategy. Still, they considered the tangible, military benefits to be more important than the intangible, political costs.⁷⁹⁷

Given their belief in the intrinsic passivity and malleability of the population, the military

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., Ageron, pp. 340

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid., Ageron, pp. 344.

⁷⁹⁷ To demonstrate that this subjective weighting of the effects of *regroupement* is a function of operational code rather than nationality, it is worth citing the views of LTC John McCuen, an American military authority on counterinsurgency: "An objective view of the French experience with *regroupement* in Algeria, not to mention those in Malaya and Cambodia, would indicate that the concept is sound. Although there are some disadvantages of great expense and of initial alienation of the population, the advantages seem to far outweigh them. When well organized by civic action teams and combined with effective self-defence, *regroupement* can create an environment in which guerillas find it very difficult to live. It can facilitate civic and psychological action to counter-organize the population. It offers a medium to improve the living conditions of the people and effect administrative reforms. Since these are all major factors in counter-revolutionary warfare, *regroupement* can be a significant influence on its successful outcome." (John J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War: The Strategy of Counter-insurgency* (London: Pitman Press, 1969), pp. 234)

command believed that the separation of the rebels from the population was worth the potential costs in human suffering. Delouvrier and the S.A.S. leadership saw a consensual political arrangement as the fundamental goal of the war and protested policies that undermined that goal. That *regroupement* played a large role in the success of the Challe campaigns is indisputable. The important point is that the military's *regroupement* methods, with their emphasis on coercive control, effectively ended the hope for a long-term, consensual arrangement between the Muslim population and the French authorities.

The *commandos de chasse* were equally double edged. While the commandos increased the pressure on the guerillas, and did so at a lower manpower cost than earlier forms of static *quadrillage*, they often did so by imposing a counter-terror on the population. Former guerillas frequently resorted to methods they had used in the service of the ALN. One French officer described the "Georges" commando, one of the first units of its kind, as a "magnificent band of enraged dogs, desperados fighting ferociously, such perfect mercenaries that no ideal motivated them anymore." Their behavior in one "pacification" operation illustrates the potential for abuse:

Naturally the majority of the men of the commando worked within the population – it would be more exact to say that they worked the population over – according to the techniques learned in the enemy camp. Their remarkable tallies were often the product of terror and defiance of the rules. Rather than trust the testimony of Djebbar [a local informant], the men of "Georges" swooped down on the regroupement [camp] of Aïn Mekter in order obtain intelligence for themselves through the use of violence. Their method of investigation, however unjustifiable it might be, can be explained in part by the deplorable fashion in which a good number of the *regroupements* had been set up - poorly organized, poorly supplied and poorly protected. The former insurgents who made up the Georges commando remembered that it was in these *regroupement* camps that they had once gone to sleep, eat and recover.... The thugs raped the women, pillaged the houses and tortured the men in such a way that seven succumbed.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid., Le Mire, pp. 287.

C. Hary, an S.A.S. officer serving in the Oranie (*wilaya* 5) made similar observations about commando Yatagan:

When I was in the SAS detachment in Djeballa, the commando Yatagan left Nemours and came down the valley toward the SAS, they were perfect killers, thieves and rapists. Entire douars [villages] came to seek refuge beneath the walls of the SAS [compound] in order to place themselves under our protection.⁷⁹⁹

As in the case of *regroupement*, the *commandos de chasse* delivered military results at the cost of the long term alienation of the population. Mixed Algerian and French irregular units were more successful in locating, pursuing and eliminating the smaller ALN bands that remained in the wake of the major combat operations. But they could do so only by intensifying the Hobbesian war in the countryside. ALN guerillas were increasingly insecure but this did not mean that the local populations reaped any benefits. Asked to describe the mood in August 1960, another S.A.S. officer explained that the Muslim population “was between the anvil and the hammer. They fear the Army and the FLN.”⁸⁰⁰

Even where extreme measures suppressed ALN violence, the shift in the fortunes of the war did not necessarily lead to Muslims to rally to the French cause. In spite of increased French efforts to protect, organize and indoctrinate the population, Muslims tended to pursue various hedging strategies. As one observer noted, the same men who fought in the village self-defense forces often sent their wives to deliver food to the rebels.⁸⁰¹ Only by appeasing the Army and the FLN could the average inhabitant hope to survive the escalating war in which the population was “a punching bag.”⁸⁰²

⁷⁹⁹ C. Hary as cited in *ibid.*, Mathias, pp. 149.

⁸⁰⁰ Lieutenant H. as cited in Claude Dufresnoy, *Des Officiers Parlent* (Paris: Rene Juillard, 1961), pp. 123.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*, Villatoux, pp. 490.

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*, Feraoun, pp. 201.

Where Muslims departed from the hedging strategies, they did so in favor of nationalist rebels. Colonel Bigeard, the noted para commander and zealous believer in the *guerre révolutionnaire* doctrine, nevertheless recounted the growing gap between the fortunes of the ALN and the views of the population: “But in the monthly bulletin signed by Colonel Bigeard, if he noted that ‘the [ALN] morale has fallen very low,’ he also recognized: ‘In contrast, if one observes détente with the Muslim population, it remains nationalist in sentiment.’”⁸⁰³ Brigadier L. Jackson, the British military attaché in Paris, noted that when populations did rally to the French, they did so out of fear rather than affection or genuine conversion:

Though no Frenchman will admit it, in my mind there is very little doubt that the [Muslim] communities rally to the French, not because of any loyalty to the French, but purely because they are fed up with the rebellion and with the extortion of the rebels. If they have no idealistic attachment to France, they will obviously have no hesitation in changing sides if protection is withdrawn from them.⁸⁰⁴

General Ailleret, the commander of French forces in Northern Constantinois from June 1960 on, made an even more pessimistic appraisal of the net effects of French pacification:

...the policy of pacification by social and psychological action produced, by all appearances, excellent results on the surface but, basically, the *mohammeds* of the *bled* were not with us but with their brothers of the *djebels* [mountains], more or less actively, certainly, but with them all the same.⁸⁰⁵

Close observations of Muslim behavior belied the simple social constructs of the GR theorists. Where those theorists and much of the high command saw the population as a passive prize, the Muslim population, beset by violent agents of both camps, continued to exhibit a consistent preference for their nationalist co-ethnics.

⁸⁰³ Ibid., Meynier, pp. 301.

⁸⁰⁴ Martin Thomas, “The British Government and the end of French Algeria, 1958-1962” in Martin S. Alexander, J.F.V. Keiger (eds.) *France and the Algerian War, 1954-1962: Strategy, Operations and Diplomacy* (Portland: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 178.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., Villatoux, pp. 490.

As the rolling offensives of the Challe Plan reached their terminus in the spring of 1960, the balance sheet was again mixed. Challe's operations had shattered the weakened and isolated ALN forces inside Algeria. Those units that remained were reduced to starvation. Yet this victory had been achieved only by placing one third of the Muslim population in regroupement camps and imposing a reign of terror in the countryside. Though some officers in the field disagreed, the French high command was united in their belief that the final victory was near. The civilian authorities and the SAS hierarchy, by contrast, feared that the Challe plans had left them at a new but unsustainable equilibrium. A solution that rested on an open ended occupation by several hundred thousand and the forced isolation of a third or more of the native population was simply a more expensive form of the military stalemate that had prevailed on the eve of Challe's appointment.

Phase 5: Self-determination, Negotiations and the Coup (March 1960-May 1961)

De Gaulle's enthusiasm for Model 2 strategies had begun to wane by the fall of 1959. After the failure of his conciliatory measures in 1958 and the crescendo of the Challe offensives in 1959, de Gaulle had decided that the military victory and the coercive "political" victory of the GR theorists were both hollow. While the military oscillated between Model 1 and Model 2, it was de Gaulle who began to edge closer to a Model 3 approach which acknowledged the active role of the Muslim population and elites. Rather than confront the army or the settlers head on, de Gaulle reasserted civilian control by adjusting his policy. It was the growing gap between a Model 2 military strategy and a Model 3 policy that triggered the military coup of April 1961. With the

suppression of the coup, de Gaulle engaged in a series of ultimately unsuccessful negotiations that ended in French withdrawal on FLN terms.

Causes of Search: Two Lenses, Two Opinions

By the summer of 1959, civilian observers were less sanguine than military leaders. Even with the substantial military gains of the Challe offensives, Delouvrier's cabinet issued a decidedly downbeat appraisal of French fortunes:

They feared "we won't come out of it," according to a July 1959,"that the rebellion and the terrorism are hydras with a hundred heads." The rebels were able to reconstitute their political and military formations, and international opinion appeared more and more susceptible to their arguments. The Muslim population had not gone over to them, the authors maintained, but "the blood, plus the tears, plus the FLN (its existence, its dynamism, its organization, its conviction, its exploits) create the consciousness of 'the Algerian nation' and the ideal of independence." Under the circumstances, they concluded, political and economic reforms failed to resonate and military victories were never more than partial.⁸⁰⁶

The cabinet did not contest Challe's of episodic success – instead they questioned the permanence of these gains and their impact on Muslim sentiment. Whatever their doubts, Delouvrier and his advisors lacked the power to alter military strategy. The military's settlement and re-organization of the rural population had made the Army the most important single force in local administration. In spite of de Gaulle's first purge of the most politically radical officers in the winter of 1958, and his efforts to extract the army from Algerian politics, many officers were openly contemptuous of the Delegate-General. Colonel Argoud, one of Massu's staff officers and a leading GR theoretician, challenged Delouvrier in these terms:

You are giving us a lecture worthy of a political science professor and not that of a person responsible for the government in Algeria. Your arguments referring to world opinion...are those of a professor of history, of an intellectual. It's all very moving, but in no way does it correspond with reality. You're not in contact with the population as we are.⁸⁰⁷

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid., Connelly, pp. 207.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid., Horne, pp. 355-356.

For these reasons, the struggle for policy and strategy was reduced to a clash between de Gaulle and a confident but frustrated army. As late as April 1959, de Gaulle appeared hopeful about the prospects of military action: "I believe that we may have a military solution to the Algerian affaire, because the barriers on the frontiers play their role and it may be possible to get rid of the adversary fairly quickly."⁸⁰⁸ In an inspection tour of the Kabylia, de Gaulle received more indications that the offensives had not altered the nationalist position of the Muslim population:

Just as I was leaving, the Muslim town clerk stopped me and, bowing and trembling, and murmured: Mon général, don't be taken in! Everyone here wants independence." At Saida, where the heroic Bigeard introduced me to a commando unit who had been won over, I caught sight of a young Arab doctor attached to their group. "Well doctor, what do you think of it all?" "What we Arabs want, and what we need," he replied, his eyes filled with tears, "is to be responsible for ourselves instead of others being responsible for us."⁸⁰⁹

With no end in sight, de Gaulle decided in the summer of 1959 to embark on a radical change in French policy.⁸¹⁰ While the French army continued to prosecute its final offensives, de Gaulle announced on September 16, 1959 that French policy would be based on "self-determination." Appealing to the Algerian masses and not to the FLN, de Gaulle proposed a referendum with three choices: integration, association, or secession. De Gaulle made clear that the first option, and the basis of French policy from 1955 to 1959, was moribund. The third option would be unthinkably self-destructive; a precipitous move to independence would leave an Algerian republic without the aid necessary to fuel modernization. Without stating it directly, de Gaulle signaled his preference for an association which combined internal self-rule with close economic and

⁸⁰⁸ Charles de Gaulle as cited in Khaled Nezzar, *Algérie, Journal de guerre* (1954-1962) (Paris: Éditions Publisud, 2004), pp. 55.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid., Horne, pp. 340.

⁸¹⁰ Gil Merom, "A 'Grand Design?' Charles de Gaulle and the End of the Algerian War," *Armed Forces and Society*, Winter 1999, Volume 25, No. 2, pp. 286, fn 38;

defense cooperation. He also made clear that the referendum would be held only after hostilities had ended.

De Gaulle's volte-face was the turning point of the war. In a single speech he had repudiated integration or assimilation, the French policy of the past century. His abrupt shift in policy left the Challe plan and the army's institutions of population control suspended in mid air. A strategy that had as its aim the coercive control the population had been unhinged by a policy that rested on free choice of the same subject populations. Third, for the first time since the opening months of Soustelle's tenure, France had articulated a policy that acknowledged and depended on the active participation and cooperation of the Muslim population and elites.

A Moving Target: French Policy and Military Reactions

The French military reacted to self-determination with a mixture of shock and disbelief. The move from a fixed policy goal of integration to a variable goal set by Muslim opinion was deeply unsettling. The tools of warfare and population control developed under Salan and Challe had no clear application in the context of procedural democracy. The very ambiguity of the eventual policy made it difficult to develop alternative military and political strategies. Challe expressed his profound displeasure in a letter to Prime Minister Debré:

One does not propose to soldiers to go and get killed for an imprecise final objective.....This is the difference, moreover, between the mercenary army and the citizens' army. One can thus only ask of soldiers of the army of Algeria today that they die in order for Algeria to remain French.⁸¹¹

These doubts were partially assuaged by messages from Debré that the policy was intended for international consumption. Delouvrier encouraged the army to convince the

⁸¹¹ Ibid., Horne, pp. 346-347.

population of the need for a French solution of integration or close association. Many officers accepted this representation of self-determination as “an export item” designed to relieve U.N. pressure.⁸¹²

In retrospect, de Gaulle’s ambiguity was deliberate. Though it appears that he sought to secure the most favorable exit outcome possible in Algeria, he had concluded by 1959 that the end of the war was imperative and that the only exit lay in some form of Muslim participation. As he admitted in his memoirs, he deliberately obfuscated his plans in order to avoid an immediate backlash:

Were I to announce my intentions point-blank, there was no doubt that the sea of ignorant fear, shocked surprise, of concerted malevolence through which I was navigating would cause such a tidal wave of alarms and passions in every walk of life that the ship would capsize. I must, therefore, maneuver without ever changing course until such a time as, unmistakably, common sense broke through the mists....⁸¹³

While de Gaulle’s methods may have been justified in pragmatic terms, his disingenuous approach gave his opponents ammunition. What de Gaulle saw as a negotiator’s challenge, soldiers and settlers alike came to see as dishonesty and betrayal. Even after the shock of self-determination, the French military clung to a seemingly successful Model 2 strategy. Here again the small victories dynamic was at play. Writing in early 1960, a division commander explained the situation in these terms:

General Ailleret summarized the grounds for satisfaction: the small tallies registered fairly frequently by the *quadrillage* forces, the constant diminution inside Algeria of the rebel potential in weapons, ammunition and food, the corresponding slackening of rebel activity, reduced almost everywhere to a struggle for survival. On the frontier defense, the substantial reinforcements gave new confidence in the effectiveness of the obstacle belts in assuring the impermeability of the frontiers. The numerous local successes, unspectacular but frequent, which the majority of units registered, led to the virtual disappearance of rebel attacks and facilitated the creation of “new villages” and the development of self-defense. Thus, in the Tenes sector,” the continuing progress of the *regroupement* policy leaves the rebels no more than a twentieth of the population of the district, the advance of *quadrillage* into one time sanctuaries, led us to hope that the time is

⁸¹² Jean Nicot, “L’Armée française en Algérie au temps de l’autodétermination (septembre 1959-1960),” *Revue historique des armées*, No. 197 (décembre 1994), pp. 56.

⁸¹³ Charles de Gaulle as cited in Horne, pp. 308.

approaching when the bands will be sufficiently diminished that effective control of the population will be realized.”⁸¹⁴

To his credit, Ailleret noted the weak connection between these positive military trends and the political situation. Noting that the settlers had never accepted liberalization in any form, he observed that the Muslim populations had reacted to de Gaulle’s policy shift by adopting a wait and see approach.

The *pieds noirs* were far less charitable than the army in their interpretation of de Gaulle’s new policy. Increasing FLN violence in Algiers had encouraged extremists in the settler community to agitate in favor of a coup similar to that of May 1958. De Gaulle’s recall of General Massu, the victor of the Battle of Algiers, was the spark for a full blown insurrection in the capital. From January 24-30, 1960, Algerian settlers seized the major government buildings in Algiers and solicited the support of the army. Though many officers shared the settlers’ distaste for self-determination, the high command under Challe ultimately intervened to stop ethnic violence and prevent the spread of the *pied noir* rebellion.

De Gaulle’s public speech on the evening of January 29 underlined de Gaulle’s belief in the importance of Muslim consent in any durable political settlement:

The Algerians will tell us what they want to be. This will not be dictated to them. For if their response were not really their response, then while for a time their might well be military victory, basically nothing would be settled. On the contrary, everything can be settled and I believe I France’s favor, when the Algerians have had an opportunity to make known their will in all freedom, dignity, and security. In short, self-determination is the policy that is worthy of France. It is the only way out.

De Gaulle’s speech provoked declarations of loyalty from over 40 units in Algeria and effectively ended the week of the barricades.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹⁴ Ibid., Nicot, pp. 56-57.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid., Horne, pp. 368-370.

Having defused the immediate crisis, de Gaulle embarked on his second major purge of activist military elements. The *pied noir* militias were disbanded and their leaders arrested.⁸¹⁶ Just as he had dismissed military activists in the wake of the May 1958 uprisings, he now sacked military officers suspected of complicity; Colonels Godard, Argoud, Gardes, all leading lights in the GR campaign, were casualties of this second and more extensive purge.⁸¹⁷ De Gaulle then shuttered the military Fifth Bureau, the heart of the GR school in Algeria, and reined in the intelligence organizations that had grown into “a state within the state.”⁸¹⁸ Challe’s replacement three months later by his deputy, General Crépin, was yet another attempt to tighten civilian control.

De Gaulle’s reference to an “Algerian Algeria” on November 4, 1960 provoked renewed unrest among settlers, administrators and the Army.⁸¹⁹ Those who had hoped that “self-determination” was simply a public relations slogan were forced to recognize the profound shift in French policy. For de Gaulle’s increasingly marginalized Resident-General Delouvrier, the removal of “francisation” from the menu of self-determination undercut all his technocratic and political efforts to build a united and French order.⁸²⁰ His resignation later in November marked the end of the Challe-Delouvrier formula of Model 2 military and economic strategies.

A massive and unanticipated Muslim demonstration in Algiers on December 11, 1960 dealt another blow to the advocates of integration and even association. The sudden appearance of thousands of Algerians waving FLN flags demonstrated both the depth of support for the rebels in the capital. A violent French reaction which cost some 61 lives,

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., Horne, pp. 373.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid., Horne, pp. 373.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid., Thénault, pp. 207.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid., Droz, Lever, pp. 296.

⁸²⁰ Ibid., Horne, pp. 423.

55 Muslim, did nothing to buttress the legitimacy of French order.⁸²¹ The intricate, authoritarian structures that had delivered “spontaneous” demonstrations of support for the regime in May and September 1958 were powerless to resist Muslim opinion and renewed FLN agitation. As a shrewd French observer noted, the demonstrations forced all French parties to reassess the political landscape:

In Paris, it is considered that three myths died in Algeria over the weekend, these being the selfish myth of the white ultras that Algeria is French; the mendacious myth of the French army that only a fistful of fighting rebels in Algeria wanted independence in all those years of war; and the major, miracle myth that de Gaulle could make peace – though no one here, or probably anywhere, thinks anyone else could make it.⁸²²

Though the clashes of November 1960 may have validated de Gaulle’s critique, they also highlighted the mounting desperation of the losing parties in the emerging Algerian order. For the *pieds noirs*, the events of November confirmed their fears of marginalization and provided a rationale for violent resistance against the French state. For the architects of the Model 2 strategies, de Gaulle’s purges and his attempts to disassemble the institutions of population control jeopardized the sum total of their achievements.

It took the January 8, 1961 national referendum on self-determination to bring events to a head. Though de Gaulle received overwhelming support in metropolitan France, the abstention of 42% of Muslim voters in Algeria signaled the growing power of the FLN. The clustering of the 39% of Muslim “yes” votes in urban areas revealed the fragility of French control in rural areas, even in the wake of the Challe offensives. The settlers were nearly unanimous in voting “no” to what they correctly perceived to be the death knell of *l’Algérie française*.⁸²³

⁸²¹ Ibid., Thénault, pp. 209.

⁸²² Janet Flanner as cited in Horne, pp. 434.

⁸²³ Ibid., Pervillé, pp. 193; *ibid.*, Connelly, pp. 234.

These results pushed the *pied noir* ultras and disgruntled army elements into open revolt. In early January, the *pied noir* leaders of the “Barricades Week” joined a number of cashiered military officers to form a new anti-Gaullist organization, the *Organisation Armée Secrete* (O.A.S.).⁸²⁴ With General Salan at its head, and activist GR colonels ranging from Lacheroy to Argoud to Godard in its ranks, the OAS combined the doctrine of revolutionary warfare with the passion and commitment of the settler ultras to launch a subversive campaign against de Gaulle and his policies.

In a more serious development, the referendum accelerated coup plotting within the French army. Convinced that the referendum spelled the end of French Algeria, senior leaders, including Generals Jouhaud, Salan and Challe, began to consider a restoration of military control in Algeria. Two developments forced the plotters’ hand. De Gaulle’s replacement of the senior military commander in Algeria, General Crépin, with the more politically reliable General Gambiez, encouraged the plotters to act quickly. De Gaulle’s subsequent announcement of open negotiations with the FLN convinced the generals that they must move quickly or lose any chance of heading off French capitulation.⁸²⁵

On April 21, 1961 forces loyal to General Challe, Salan and Zeller seized control of the government offices in Algiers and arrested the Resident-General, Jean Morin, and General Gambiez. While some elite units rallied to the cause, de Gaulle repeated his feat of the “Barricades Week,” convincing the country and the army’s rank and file that the revolt was potentially ruinous. After less than a week, the revolt had collapsed and its leaders surrendered or fled into exile.

⁸²⁴ Rémi Kauffer, “OAS: la guerre franco-française d’Algérie” in Mohammed Harbi, Benjamin Stora (eds.) *La guerre d’Algérie*, pp. 676

⁸²⁵ Ibid., Kelly, pp. 311-312.

Challe's testimony in his subsequent trial revealed the civil-military divergence of opinion on the realm of political possibility in Algeria. According to Challe, the military situation was highly favorable and the political situation entirely salvageable.⁸²⁶ His plan was to renew the military push and pacify Algeria within the space of several months. With luck, such a result might pull France back from the path of unilateral concession.⁸²⁷ For Challe pacification remained a matter of security and expectations:

If the population were sure of the winner, they would refuse terrorism and terrorism would no longer be possible. The theory, the famous theory of Mao Tse-tung frequently put forward, of the water and the fishes, is still very simple and very true: if you remove the water, that is to say the support of the populations, the fish can no longer survive. This is simple, I know, but in war only simple things are realizable, and those who are here and those who have fought know this well.⁸²⁸

De Gaulle, by contrast, saw no firm bridge connecting coercive military control of the kind Challe had wrought and stable, low cost social order. As he would later write:

The war was all but over. Military success was achieved. Operations had been reduced to next to nothing. Instead politics dominated the scene, and in this respect the communities were further apart than they had ever been.⁸²⁹

The coup and its rapid collapse marked the final inflection point in French policy in Algeria. De Gaulle purged the army a third time, removing those commanders and units who had rallied to Challe's standard. While de Gaulle attempted unsuccessfully to exploit his military position and the internal divisions of the rebels, the FLN ultimately secured independence on its own terms. France was unable to safeguard any of its subsidiary interests: the fate of colons and Muslim loyalists, control in the oil rich Sahara, or long term military basing. The Algerian war had ended in defeat.

⁸²⁶ Ibid., Challe, *Notre Révolte*, pp. 82.

⁸²⁷ Ibid., Kelly, pp. 316-317.

⁸²⁸ Ibid., Challe, pp. 82.

⁸²⁹ De Gaulle as cited in Horne, pp. 424-425.

Algeria and the Theory

The Algerian case bears out many of the theory's central predictions. In its second consecutive campaign, the French military faithfully repeated the dominant patterns of interwar and intrawar learning dysfunction. As noted in Chapter 4, the French military began a vibrant if bounded debate about the causes of defeat in Indochina and their implications for future conflicts. This debate had almost no influence on the allocation of resources and attention within the Defense Ministry. In spite of clear warnings of unrest in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, the military was quick to turn its attention from counterinsurgency to conventional rearmament and atomic warfare. Consequently, France entered its second campaign in Algeria with the same Model 1 reflex.

French intrawar behavior followed the dominant pattern as well. The French responded to the rebellion with Model 1 strategy. When attacks on the guerillas failed to extinguish resistance, the civil government made a bid to impose a Model 3 alternative. This Model 3 initiative under Soustelle was undone by a combination of enemy escalation, military skepticism, and massive French reinforcement. Having returned to the Model 1 path, the French military devoted the next year to material and normative escalation. Trend failure and the shocks of the Ben Bella affaire and Suez prompted a change to Model 2 strategy in 1957. Population control stabilized the situation but produced a new stalemate. After a brief flirtation with Model 3 concessions, the French returned to military escalation as the answer to Model 2 stalemate. The Challe offensives broke the guerilla movement inside Algeria but only through massive resettlement, low grade rural terror, and repeated conventional offensives.

The military operational code played a visible role in French, wartime decision-making. General Cherrière fell victim to the illusion of familiarity in the winter of 1954. For Cherrière and his successor Lorillot, the problem appeared military in nature and minor in scale. The lopsided results of tactical encounters with ALN guerillas baited the Model 1 learning trap. Secure in their military prowess, French military leaders continued to rely on manpower increases until the practical limits on reinforcement had been reached. Once Salan had launched his Model 2 campaign in 1957, the French military fell into the Model 2 learning trap. Coercive population control made it impossible to measure true public sentiment and the French focused instead on measures of performance to gauge political progress. Fixated on their own good acts rather than the political effects of those acts, the French overstated the level of Algerian support for French authority.

Civilian participation played an important role in all three episodes of Model 3 choice. Soustelle's appointment was the result of a bid by the Paris government to reassert control over strategy. His parallel evaluation of Cherrière's campaign led to him to adopt a radically different approach. Soustelle's political background led him to frame the problem in terms of political exchange rather than compellance. Whether in his negotiations with Muslim opposition groups, or in his offers of political equality and inclusion to the rural masses, Soustelle sought to end resistance by offering power and status to disenfranchised groups. De Gaulle's 1958 trial balloons – the Constantine Plan and the *paix des braves* amnesty – were attempts to break the Model 2 stalemate with Model 3 concessions. De Gaulle's later introduction of self-determination was the final

expression of Model 3 reasoning. Here, rising civilian participation collided with high military resources to provoke a civil-military crisis.

Resources played an important role in reinforcing the dominant pattern. The absence of any constraint on military manpower encouraged military leaders to pursue offensive operations against the guerillas. Until the limit of those resources had been reached in 1957, the French military showed little interest in the search for alternative strategies. By that time, massive reinforcement and the transfer of many administrative duties to uniformed personnel had made the French military the true sovereign in Algeria. Factor endowments also played a role in reinforcing Model 1 and Model 2 solutions. The presence of overwhelming numbers of troops gave commanders the tools to pursue labor intensive offensive and later defensive operations.

Chapter 6

The Model and the French Cases: Theory, Prediction, Evidence and Fit

How well does the theory developed in Chapter 2 explain observed behavior in the three French cases? How well does this theory compare with the alternative explanations presented in Chapter 1? The purpose of this chapter is to examine the internal validity of the proposed theory within the confines of this three case sample. In order to do this, we ask four questions. First, are the dominant patterns in fact present? Second, can these patterns be traced to the influence of the military operational code and bureaucratic interests? Third, do changes in the independent variables – task pressure, civilian participation and resources – account for deviation from these dominant patterns? Fourth, do the causal mechanisms outlined in Chapter 2 explain the connections between the independent and dependent variables?

The chapter is broken into two sections. The first is an analytical summary of the three cases. The object of this section is to compare the model's predictions with the patterns and variations in strategic choice across and within the cases. Drawing on the material of the case chapters, we will seek to explain each major change or potential change in strategy. The second section will examine the role of the three independent variables – task performance, civilian participation, and resources - in explaining departures from the dominant pattern. The task is twofold: 1) to establish the correlation between changes in the independent variables and the observed outcomes and 2) to identify the specific casual mechanisms linking such changes with the outcomes.⁸³⁰

⁸³⁰ For a comprehensive table of the independent variables, causal mechanisms and testable hypotheses, see the table on pages 127-128 of Chapter 2.

Analytical Summary of the French Cases

The French strategy in Indochina revolved around Model 1 or counterinsurgency as small war. Though the conflict opened with a Model 3 strategy, this approach did not survive early changes in military leadership and the arrival of French reinforcements. Once open war with the Viet Minh had begun, the French devoted their resources and attention to improving the efficiency of their Model 1 concept. From 1946 through 1952, they sought to engage and destroy the Viet Minh army in decisive battle. During the same period, they struggled unsuccessfully to eradicate guerilla resistance and pacify the populated regions of Tonkin and Cochinchina. The largely positive military feedback from battles with guerillas and main force units reinforced the military's attachment to Model 1 and masked the underlying problems with campaign strategy. By 1952, the failure of repeated pacification campaigns and the stalemate on the conventional front encouraged the high command to experiment with elements of a Model 2 strategy including population resettlement, population control, and the sponsorship of anti-Viet Minh partisan movements. In the final year of the war, under pressure from French political leaders and American military advisers, the high command began to retrace its steps in the direction of Model 1. While the high command did not stamp out the Model 2 experiments, the weight of their efforts returned to the search for decisive battle. While they continued to pursue offensive pacification in the North and South, this was seen primarily as a prelude to the decisive battle with Viet Minh main force units in 1954 and 1955.

French defeat in Indochina provoked a heated intellectual debate within the military. While military leaders were genuinely committed to understanding the origins of defeat and their prescriptive implications, the debate remained confined to solutions compatible with the military operational code: Model 1 and Model 2. Very few contemporary military observers were drawn to Leclerc's Model 3 formula of negotiating while fighting. While this intellectual debate raged, and indications of serious unrest in North Africa mounted, the French military shifted from preparations for counterinsurgency to conventional defense in Europe.

When the rebellion in Algeria erupted in November 1954, the French appeared poised to apply the insights of the Indochina experience and the postwar debates. Instead, in spite of this experience, the French responded to the FLN uprising with Model 1. The dismal results of the first winter's campaign and mounting unease among civilian leaders led to a brief flirtation with Model 3. As in the earlier conflict, the military instinctively resisted Model 3 formulas predicated on the consent of local elites and populations. Enemy escalation and the flood of French reinforcements undermined the Model 3 strategy, and by September 1955 the focus returned to Model 1 and escalation.

Two years into the war, the unchecked expansion of the rebellion, failure at Suez, and the limited impact of massive French reinforcements precipitated a shift from Model 1 to Model 2. For the next two years, the French army sought to apply the Model 2 insights of Indochina on a grand scale. While the combination of high force levels and Model 2 strategy managed to stop the growth of the rebellion, it did not bring the campaign victory. Mounting frustration among military and political leaders led to a reassessment in the fall of 1958. When offers of amnesty and economic investment

failed to produce the desired reaction in the enemy camp, de Gaulle endorsed a dramatic intensification of Model 2 pacification and the return of large scale, Model 1 maneuver in the Challe offensives. While the military saw the results of these offensives as proof of impending success, the civilian leadership under de Gaulle saw them as proof of the bankruptcy of French Model 2 strategy. De Gaulle's announcement of Model 3 policies fatally undermined the military's Model 2 campaign and eventually prompted them to launch the April 1961 coup. Though he survived the military challenge to his authority, de Gaulle's late application of Model 3 strategies ended in failure as the FLN secured all its major objectives at the expense of the French state.

Episode 1: French Indochina, Model 1 and the Learning Trap

Initial Response: Model 3

The French war in Indochina began under the least promising circumstances. By the fall of 1945, French authority had collapsed, Viet Minh leaders had erupted onto the scene, and the French lacked the resources to mount a conventional reconquest of Indochina – a clear illustration of the budget constraint mechanism. Because he lacked the power to reconquer the territory by force of arms, Leclerc pursued a Model 3 strategy that restored French control of Indochina with a fraction of the troops available to his successors. Within eight months of his return to Hanoi, Leclerc's political military strategy had been undone and the French were embroiled in the "holy war" he had strenuously sought to avoid.

The Model 3 response of the first year of the conflict was the product of Leclerc's extreme resource scarcity, personal insight, and extensive civilian participation in

strategy. Leclerc's unusual background made him more receptive to Model 3 strategies than many other senior military officers. Leclerc was astoundingly young. He had started the Second World War as a 38 year old captain; by 1945 he had risen to the rank of four star general by 1945. Personal adherence to the MOC is in part a function of professional socialization; selection and self-selection make long serving general officers the least likely to hold unorthodox views on the logical underpinnings of the profession.⁸³¹ Leclerc was in this sense an anomaly: his station and authority had come without the traditional indoctrination and the repetitive selection that often eliminates heterodox views.⁸³² The substance of Leclerc's prewar and wartime experience was just as unusual. His formative experiences as a commander of native forces in Morocco gave him an early appreciation of irregular warfare.⁸³³ Similarly, his early campaigns in Africa were essentially political projects; his success in that phase rested more on his skills as a coup plotter and colonial administrator than on his military skills. Though he would gain greater notoriety for his late war conventional exploits in North Africa and Europe, it was the earlier tests that made him more receptive to integrated political military strategy in Indochina.

While his unusual pedigree made Leclerc more open to Model 3 approaches, it was extreme resource scarcity that made such a path nearly unavoidable. The mismatch between the scale of the task and the resources available forced Leclerc to craft a plan based as much on stagecraft as on battle. Leclerc lacked the forces necessary to destroy

⁸³¹ James G. March, "Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning," *Organization Science*, Volume 2, Number 1, February 1991, pp. 79, 85.

⁸³² Anthony Clayton, *Three Marshals of France: Leadership after Trauma*, (London: Brassey's, 1992), pp. 123.

⁸³³ André Martel, *Leclerc: Le soldat et le politique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), pp. 60-75; *ibid.*, Clayton, *Three Marshals of France: Leadership after Trauma*, pp. 36-37.

the Viet Minh or forcibly eject the 150,000 Chinese Nationalist troops occupying Tonkin.⁸³⁴ The impossibility of victory through force of arms made a combination of battle, bluff, and negotiation the only feasible choice.

Early Reassessment: Model 3 to Model 1

Though Leclerc managed to reconquer Indochina in five months with very modest forces, his Model 3 formula did not survive military skepticism and a positive resource shock. Military leaders, including Admiral d'Argenlieu, the high commissioner, had always been uneasy with Leclerc's *modus vivendi* with a known enemy of French control. Leclerc's success, rising French troop levels, and Chinese withdrawal made a Model 1 military solution appear feasible. Given a choice between Leclerc's ambiguous condominium and the opportunity for a decisive military encounter with the militarily weak Viet Minh, the French military embraced the latter. The *volte face* of 1947 illustrated the allure of Model 1, the intense distaste for Model 3, and the remarkable power of resources to seduce militaries into strategic backsliding. Once material constraints had been lifted, the military applied its preferred solution to counterinsurgency – Model 1.

In the eyes of the military, the results of the early battles in Hanoi and Haiphong seemed to validate the switch from Model 3 to Model 1. Though Leclerc, Saintenay and the architects of the *modus vivendi* lamented the start of a “holy war,” Admiral d'Argenlieu and General Valluy had driven the Viet Minh from the capital and forced

⁸³⁴ Ronald H. Spector, *In the Ruins of Empire: The Japanese Surrender and the Battle for Postwar Asia* (New York: Random House, 2007), pp. 255; Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the U.S. Army in Vietnam 1941-1960* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), pp. 52; Yves Gras, *Histoire de la Guerre d'Indochine* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1979), pp. 72.

them to retreat to the base areas of Tonkin and Annam. Measured in terms of loss ratios and control of the battlefield, the confrontation appeared a success. That said, the victories did not bring the campaign victory the command had hoped to achieve. Instead, the conflict had reached a new equilibrium with the French in control of the urban areas and the major roads and the Viet Minh in control of the rural areas. Not surprisingly, the military sought to break this stalemate by a Model 1 escalation: a large scale, decapitation strike on the Viet Minh sanctuaries of northern Tonkin. Operations Lea and Ceinture showcased a professional, highly mobile and effective French Expeditionary corps capable of winning every tactical engagement with its guerilla opponents and clearing large swathes of territory. When rapid maneuver failed to produce decisive results, the architects railed against the constraints of limited manpower and insufficient duration; the core logic of the Model 1 campaign remained unexamined. The French command was convinced that local successes were cumulative and the underlying strategy was sound.

With the 1947 offensives, the French had entered a long and debilitating learning trap. Uniformly positive tactical results appeared to validate Model 1 and begged reinforcement of these successes. The resources and attention of the Expeditionary Corps were focused on perfecting the Expeditionary Corps hammer and baiting the enemy into decisive battle. On the other side of the ledger, French forces were unable to prevent the “rot” or deterioration of population control in cleared areas. In classic Model 1 fashion, military leaders attributed this to Viet Minh strategy and French material weakness rather than local sentiment. Rather than reassess strategy or underlying assumptions, French leaders in the opening three years of the war preferred to “treat” and retreat restive areas.

The hard cap on French troop reinforcements left the preferred escalatory option untested and therefore seductive.

Strategic Search Foregone: Model 1 to Model 1

The early Indochina stalemate was broken by catastrophic failure at Cao Bang in 1950. The new, Chinese trained, Viet Minh army inflicted a crushing, conventional defeat on the exposed border outposts in Tonkin. The ensuing crisis of confidence appeared to open the door to more extensive strategic search. Instead, the arrival of de Lattre, the charismatic leader, set in motion a restoration and escalation of Model 1 rather than an exploration of alternatives. The ill conceived Viet Minh exploitation of the Cao Bang victory led to three French defensive victories in the space of three months. De Lattre's restoration, and his success in securing expanded metropolitan and American aid, set the stage for a repetition of the learning trap on a larger scale. Once again, tactical success and escalatory opportunities trumped any interest in extensive strategic search. De Lattre's tenure, cut short by his death in 1951, encouraged a belief in many quarters that Model 1, in the hands of a properly resourced and charismatic military leader, held the answer to the Indochina dilemma and revolutionary war in general.⁸³⁵

⁸³⁵ The recent publication of a glowing account of de Lattre's tenure in the American military journal *Military Review* (Lieutenant Colonel Michel Goya, Lieutenant Colonel Philippe Francois, "The Man who Bent Events: 'King John' in Indochina," *Military Review* (September-October 2007), pp. 52-61) demonstrates the enduring appeal of the "resurrection" parable. The authors, both serving French military officers, paint de Lattre's policy and strategies in uniformly positive terms. The closing passage of the article suggests that de Lattre's successes were only cut short by his untimely death: "In just one year, 'the French MacArthur' had restored fighting morale and esprit among French troops, won three major battles, given enormous impetus to the creation of a free Vietnamese army, and shored up support for the war among French and Allied politicians. No one can say for sure that the war would have ended differently had de Lattre survived, but he was undoubtedly the right man in the right place at the right time. His single major failing was that he joined his only son too soon."

Experiments with Political War: Model 1 to Model 1.5

With the death of de Lattre and the appointment of General Salan, the French high command began to confront the limits of Model 1. De Lattre's last act, made under mounting pressure from French and American leaders, had been to launch a conventional offensive outside the Red River delta to seize Hoa Binh. What de Lattre had intended as a way to divide and weaken the Viet Minh soon evolved into a debilitating battle of attrition. Salan, the architect of Operations Lea and Ceinture and de Lattre's primary subordinate, had learned much about the limits of Model 1. His first act was to withdraw from the perilous French position at Hoa Binh; his second was to launch a series of Model 2 initiatives (civil-military pacification units, French sponsored Montagnard insurgent groups, and resettlement operations in Cambodia). Salan's deliberate shift from a strategy centered on main force battle to one focused on population control was the second turning point in French strategy.⁸³⁶ Though Viet Minh offensives would force Salan to mount increasingly elaborate, conventional maneuvers to stave off collapse in Tonkin, he had come to believe that control of the Vietnamese population held the key to long term success in Indochina.

The growing strength of the Viet Minh army and the continued deterioration of the military situation in 1952 and 1953 led French and American leaders to call for a change in strategy and leadership. Both groups saw the solution in a return to more aggressive Model 1 formulas. The contemporary reports of American military advisers provide powerful supporting evidence of the professional origins of intrawar learning dysfunction. Unencumbered by concerns about the future of the French army, American

⁸³⁶ The first inflection point was the move from Leclerc's Model 3 strategy to the d'Argenlieu/Valluy Model 1 strategy in late 1946. The second was Salan's 1951 turn from Model 1 to experimentation with Model 2.

military advisers nevertheless saw the predicament much as the French high command had in 1946 and 1947. The solution lay in decisive battle with the enemy army; Salan's Model 2 initiatives and seemingly defensive orientation were distractions from this central task. Under pressure from the Americans, and beholden to them for economic and military aid, the French replaced Salan with a commander with no previous experience in the theater. Though General Navarre did nothing to stamp out Salan's Model 2 experiments, his arrival marked a shift back towards Model 1 priorities. In a repetition of failed French strategies of 1947-1950, Navarre and his American advisers hoped that offensive pacification in the south in 1954, and rapid expansion of the native armies of the Associated States, would give him the tools to break the Viet Minh army in 1955. Leadership rotation and American professional opinion had led the French army back to its conceptual starting point – the military operational code and Model 1 response.

Interwar Purge: Self-evaluation and Backsliding (Model 1 to Model 2 to Model 1)

Clear and catastrophic defeat at Dien Bien Phu, followed by French concession at Geneva, provided another opportunity for reassessment of counterinsurgency strategy. Though the military had employed all three models at various points in Indochina, the postwar debate was strictly confined to arguments for and against Models 1 and 2. Though these professional debates were intense and candid, the organizational response was dominated by the problems of European defense. Far from incorporating or building upon the lessons of Indochina, the removal of immediate task pressure led the French defense establishment to turn from revolutionary war to conventional war in Europe.

Even as warnings of revolutionary unrest in North Africa mounted, the organization appeared bent on investing its resources and energy into conventional rearmament.

The implicit boundaries of the interwar search are themselves a testament to the power of the military operational code and the organization's distaste for Model 3. While advocates of Models 1 and 2 could agree on the shortcomings in political resolve and manpower in Indochina, few military officers at the time were attracted to Leclerc's Model 3 blend of negotiation and military force. The idea of combining negotiation, national or local, civilian or military in origin, with the conduct of war was met with ridicule and disdain in military circles. The constraints on French manpower in Indochina made even this bounded debate between Models 1 and 2 inconclusive; behind every Model 1 argument was the untested assertion that massive troop reinforcement might have changed the outcome. Few Model 2 advocates openly disputed this manpower critique as their alternatives were just as dependent on abundant manpower. What both camps ignored was the paradox of Leclerc's shoestring successes of 1945-1946; the French had restored partial control in Indochina when their strength vis-à-vis the Viet Minh and Nationalist Chinese was near its nadir.

The gap between these professional debates and the defense establishment's reaction is even more telling. While veterans of the conflicts and leading defense experts debated the merits of Models 1 and 2, the organization welcomed the end of the war as an opportunity to return to conventional rearmament. The intellectual efforts to explain defeat and prescribe alternative approaches to counterinsurgency were almost entirely detached from the ministerial and general staff arguments over resource allocation and rearmament.

French organizational interwar behavior is entirely at odds with a number of the leading alternative explanations of interwar learning. None of the experience explanations appears to match the observed behavior. Fewer than six months separated the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the All Saints' Day uprising in Algeria: far too short an amount of time for the army, particularly the professional cadre of the Expeditionary Corps, to forget the experiences of the past decade of counterinsurgency. That war had clearly contributed to the stock of recent and relevant experience in counterinsurgency; this additional raw experience did not, however, lead the military to revise their existing doctrine or channel resources or attention into this area. Nor was this a problem of insufficient processing of raw experience. Both the official studies and the lively professional debate over defeat in Indochina demonstrated the military's willingness and ability to consolidate, evaluate raw experience, and produce lessons. These debates make the almost instantaneous turn from counterinsurgency to European rearmament even more revealing. This reaction was neither a "last war" reflex nor an unbiased estimate of the "most likely" war. Instead it resembled something closer to a "preferred" war reflex, in which the removal of immediate task pressure set in motion a return to the organization's core preferences as expressed in a standard mission set.

The period between the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the start of the Algerian rebellion should have been an opportunity to consolidate and apply the lessons of the Indochina war. It was not. As task pressure ebbed, the overwhelming temptation on the part of the defense establishment was to turn from a complex, distasteful and unrewarding problem of revolutionary war to the simpler, more appealing and institutionally gratifying problem of European rearmament. This was true even in the

face of immediate revolutionary war threats in North Africa. The French military did not use the pause between Indochina and Algeria to perfect and then field a force designed for counterinsurgency; instead they behaved as if the last war had been an unpleasant anomaly. The military's rapid shift from counterinsurgency to conventional defense meant that they would open the Algerian war almost as unprepared as they had in 1945.

Episode 2: Algeria, Model 2 and Defeat

Initial response: Model 1

For the French military, Algeria was an opportunity to apply the experience and “lessons” of Indochina to a new revolutionary war. The value of the object in the new contest was far higher and this translated into greater material and political resolve. A French state that had balked at providing more than 150,000 troops in Indochina had by the second year of the Algerian war dispatched over 400,000. The Algerian insurgents lacked a powerful external sponsor to play the role of a Middle Eastern China. Moreover, recent experience and reflection provided a foundation for improved strategic choice. Having tested Models 1, 2 and 3 in Indochina and devoted considerable intellectual effort to untangling the “lessons” of the conflict, the military should have been better prepared to respond to counterinsurgency.

In practice it was not and the French military did not pick up where it had left off. Though they had pioneered Model 2 strategies in the later stages of Indochina, it took over two years for the high command to implement a similar solution in Algeria. Whatever advantages the French may have possessed in the operational realm were more than offset by the political complexity of the emerging conflict. Though contemporary

military leaders⁸³⁷ tended to assume that operational advantages would make Algeria an easier test than Indochina, these ignored the paralytic influence of the settler community on political reform. Here again, the military's core assumptions about the significance and agency of the local population created a critical blind spot. In a conventional military problem, the military could safely ignore the role of the population and focus on the opposing force or coalition. Though the later phases of the Indochina conflict had begun to undermine those assumptions, the military's first response in Algeria was to focus on their armed opponents and assume that the Muslim and *pied noir* populations were insignificant and unable to influence the campaign.

The initial French response to the Algerian rebellion was to mount large scale, offensive operations against the rebels – a classic Model 1 response to insurgency. The local command treated the armed insurrection as a variety of conventional war. By eliminating the guerillas and cowing the Muslim population, the French authorities hoped to restore French authority and control much as they had in 1945 after Sétif.

Almost from the start, French forces fell into the familiar, Model 1 learning trap. French encounters with Algerian rebels were consistently one sided, but these small victories did not produce the desired results on either the enemy or the population. Tactical success seemed to suggest that the same Model 1 strategy applied on a larger scale and for longer duration would translate into campaign success. Instead, in spite of

⁸³⁷ General Navarre, the last French commander in Indochina, devoted a significant portion of his 1956 account of Indochina to the comparison of the two wars. In Navarre's opinion, the circumstances in Algeria were far more favorable than those he had faced in Indochina. Navarre's opinion reflects his overwhelming focus on the military dimensions of the problem and his neglect of the powerful political dynamics of Muslim and *pied noir* nationalism. (Source: Henri Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine (1953-1954)* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1956), pp. 316-335).

sizable French reinforcement, and increasingly ruthless tactics, the rebellion expanded rapidly in scale and geographical scope.

Civilian Reassessment: Model 1 vs. Model 3

The disappointing results of the first winter and civilian concerns over the military bent of the campaign led the French government to appoint a liberal Governor-General, Jacques Soustelle. Soustelle developed a new Model 3 policy of integration based on compromise and embodied in a series of administrative, political and economic reforms. Soustelle's goal was to draw Muslim elites and masses back into a discernably French political order and reverse the tide of rebellion.

Soustelle's strategies fell into three categories. First, he sought to curtail the Sétif style repression and large unit operations which he regarded as actively counterproductive. Second, he proposed a set of administrative and economic reforms that would begin to address the gross inequalities that existed between the settler and Muslim populations. By restoring basic administration, public services and economic development, Soustelle hoped to remove the resentment that fueled the FLN rebellion. Third, he opened secret negotiations with Muslim leaders in the moderate nationalist and more radical FLN camps in an effort to explore alternatives to a deepening civil war.

Soustelle's response clearly fell within the category of Model 3 response. Whereas the military saw the population as insignificant and vulnerable to simple intimidation, Soustelle recognized the active role of Muslim elites and masses would play in any lasting resolution. Success in such an endeavor would require the consent of these

Muslim actors, including large segments of the radical opposition and the enemy camp. Soustelle saw the conflict as a war of consolidation in which appeals to the Muslim masses and elites were more important than Model 1 pursuit or Model 2 authoritarian control.

French military leaders disagreed with Soustelle's diagnosis and his prescription. Soustelle's attempts to limit the exercise of military force were often ignored. The senior military leadership saw the guerillas as the center of gravity; in this light, the solution was a better resourced and more ruthless Model 1 campaign rather than new initiatives aimed at Muslim elites or masses. In this context, Soustelle's plan rested on his ability to impose logically foreign, Model 3 strategies on a skeptical and military. At the same time, rising numbers of French reinforcements and a series of small victories encouraged the military to exploit Model 1 and ignore Soustelle's alternative. Weakened by military opposition and settler resistance, Soustelle's Model 3 strategy could not survive the FLN provocation at Philippeville in August 1955. At a stroke, the FLN atrocities and French reprisals discredited the cause of ethnic integration and political reconciliation, and turned the liberal Governor-General into a hardened opponent of the FLN.

It is telling that the failure of Soustelle's Model 3 strategy presaged a return to Model 1. While Model 2 alternatives were readily available, and Soustelle's and Parlange's S.A.S. initiatives provided a springboard for just such a transition, the military responded to Soustelle's fall and the expansion of the rebellion through escalation. Here the flow of manpower appears to have played a dual role. Expanded resources made it possible to play out the preferred Model 1 strategy. So long as the military command lacked the troops and legal tools to implement a robust Model 1 campaign, the failures of

the first six months of the rebellion could be rationalized in terms of inadequate resources or civilian restrictions. Equally important, the rapid expansion in military troop strength skewed the internal balance of French administrative power in Algeria. While the Governor-General and the civil authorities might exert substantial influence in a department with a garrison of 50,000 troops, the eightfold expansion in troop strength made the military the leading voice in local administration. The creation of special, militarily administered areas such as the Aurès, the delegation of special powers, and the rapid expansion in the S.A.S. all served to supplant existing structures of civil government.⁸³⁸ In short, the positive resource shock changed both the influence of the military and the range of strategic options available. Both these mechanisms, resource regression and bureaucratic influence, dragged the military towards Model 1 escalation and away from meaningful strategic search.

The Model 1 escalatory cycle continued for just over a year. Steady increases in manpower and repression resulted in increased numbers of enemy killed but failed to produce the desired effects on the campaign level. While the French continued to produce small victories, the major trends in the rebellion were overwhelmingly negative. Rebel violence continued to rise and the size and scope of the FLN organization exploded. While these negative trends eroded confidence in the strategy, it took episodic failures in the fall of 1956 to force a change in leadership and strategy. The seizure of the FLN leadership did not precipitate a collapse of the rebellion, and the strike on the purported external sponsor of the rebellion at Suez was even more disastrous.

⁸³⁸ Michel Hardy, Herve Lemoine, Thierry Sarmant, *Pouvoir politique et autorité militaire en Algérie française: Hommes, Textes, Institutions 1945-1962* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), pp. 51-52.

Political War: Model 1 to Model 2

The move to Model 2 strategy in December 1956 marked a shift from counter-guerilla war to a political war based on population control. The timing of this change in strategy is significant. On the one hand, the 25 month lag between the start of the rebellion and the application of late Indochina Model 2 strategies belies the view of organizational learning as cumulative and unbiased. Though the French military had had some success with Model 2 pacification strategies in Indochina, and had highlighted their significance in the official lessons learned studies, the military chose to apply Model 1 strategies and escalation until the shortcomings of that approach were inescapable. The two year lag in response suggests some combination of professional misunderstanding and bureaucratic antipathy towards Model 2 or 3 strategies. On the other hand, the shift from Model 1 to Model 2 was considerably faster than in the Indochina war where major reappraisal did not occur until the fifth year of the war.

There are at least two possible explanations for this acceleration. First, the scale and intensity of French and rebel responses in Algeria may have accelerated the “testing” of Model 1. Between 1946 and 1949, neither the Viet Minh nor the French Expeditionary corps had possessed the resources to play out the Model 1 strategy to its logical conclusion. In Algeria, the rapid expansion of the rebellion and the rapid influx of troops made the inadequacy of Model 1 clear much earlier. Second, individual learning by Indochina veterans, including Salan and many of his protégés, served as a hedge against the organization’s interwar rejection of Model 2. As noted in Chapter 5, many veterans expressed surprise and frustration at the failure to apply the “lessons” of

Indochina in Algeria early on. When the Model 2 advocates gained influence under Salan, they rushed to apply the “lessons” of Indochina with little regard for the differences between the conflicts. In the first four years of the war the military oscillated between two errors: what a statistician would refer to as “underfitting” and “overfitting” of strategy to recent experience. In 1955 and 1956, French leaders had discounted recent experience, preferring the Model 1 default strategy and invoking the unique circumstances of the Algerian rebellion in their defense. In 1957 and 1958, Model 2 advocates treated the FLN rebellion as an extension or sequel to the revolutionary war in Indochina. Not until 1959 did the military become comfortable with a Model 2 solution modified for Algerian conditions.

From January 1957 through December 1958, General Salan, the proponent of many of the Model 2 experiments in Indochina between 1952 and 1953, oversaw a generalized application of such methods. Under Salan, the priorities shifted from offensive action against the rebels to defensive population control. The ensuing shift in the tools (psychological, economic, and administrative) and targets (the population and the political leadership of the FLN) of the French campaign did not alter the underlying coercive logic of the campaign. Instead of adopting the logic of politics as exchange, the military redefined the political problem to fit the operational code’s construct of war.

The Model 2 strategies of this period did arrest the deterioration of the French position. The shift in emphasis from pursuit to pacification coincided with a decline and later plateau in the number of FLN attacks. At the same time, the growth of the ALN inside Algeria leveled off at a strength of roughly 20,000. Moreover, the construction of extensive frontier barriers isolated the battlefield and made local successes cumulative.

Salan also posted two major episodic successes: the Battle of Algiers and the “Battle of the Frontiers.” In the first, the French military extinguished FLN resistance in the capital through a combination of raids, torture, authoritarian political organization, and penetration of local guerilla cells. This apparent success, coming on the heels of civil administrative failure, appeared to validate Model 2 strategy and military control over strategy. The Battle of the Frontiers demonstrated the efficacy of the barrier systems and the dominance of French elite forces in the war’s only major, quasi-conventional battle.

While they had managed to stop the spread of the rebellion, the French had failed to roll it back. The rebels continued to maintain their strength in the rural sanctuaries and level of attacks remained stuck at the late 1957 levels. The ascent of de Gaulle, made against a backdrop of campaign stalemate, led to changes in leadership and strategy. Eager to restore civilian control and bring an end to the campaign, de Gaulle sacked Salan and replaced him with General Challe.

The Military Crescendo: Model 2 and Escalation

While he was determined to conclude the war on his terms, de Gaulle’s opening moves were conciliatory. Eager to capitalize on the political goodwill of his return to power, de Gaulle offered a broad amnesty to the FLN and a series of proposals for economic modernization in Algeria. These Model 3 policy initiatives, reminiscent of Soustelle’s attempts to co-opt the Algerian population and elites in 1955, did not produce the desired effects in the short term. The rebels rejected what they saw as a call for unilateral surrender, and it would take months or years for the results of the economic

initiatives to be clear. In the absence of force, de Gaulle's Model 3 initiatives did not produce individual or group defection.

Faced with the failure of these opening moves, de Gaulle directed his new military commander, General Challe, to apply decisive military pressure. The problems of the late Salan period remained essentially unchanged. While the French had managed to isolate the Algerian battlefield and establish an extensive pacification network, ALN strength and attacks remained unacceptably high.⁸³⁹ While the military was able to measure its performance of various constructive tasks (e.g. civic action, psychological operations, population control), it was unable to measure the depth and permanence of its pacification gains. Military frustration with the defensive stalemate, combined with mounting political pressure from de Gaulle, made a change in strategy inevitable.

Challe's strategic choice was shaped by the military operational code and the prevailing conditions: low civilian participation, mounting urgency and abundant resources. While de Gaulle instructed Challe to intensify the military campaign, he left the development of a new military strategy to Challe. The resulting Challe Plan, developed in the absence of metropolitan or local civilian input, was a quintessentially military answer to the stalemate. The specter of future French troop reductions introduced a "window effect" reminiscent of the Indochina war. Though Challe had 400,000 French troops under his command, the government's decision to curtail the length of conscript service meant that he would have to make due with less French

⁸³⁹ The FLN continued to mount over 1,500 attacks per month in late 1958; by contrast, de Gaulle had once suggested that the maximum, acceptable level of violence in Algeria might be in the neighborhood of 200 attacks per month (Source: Irwin M. Wall, *France, the United States and the Algerian War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 200).

manpower in the future.⁸⁴⁰ The expectation of reduced resources amplified the pressure for decisive action in the near term.

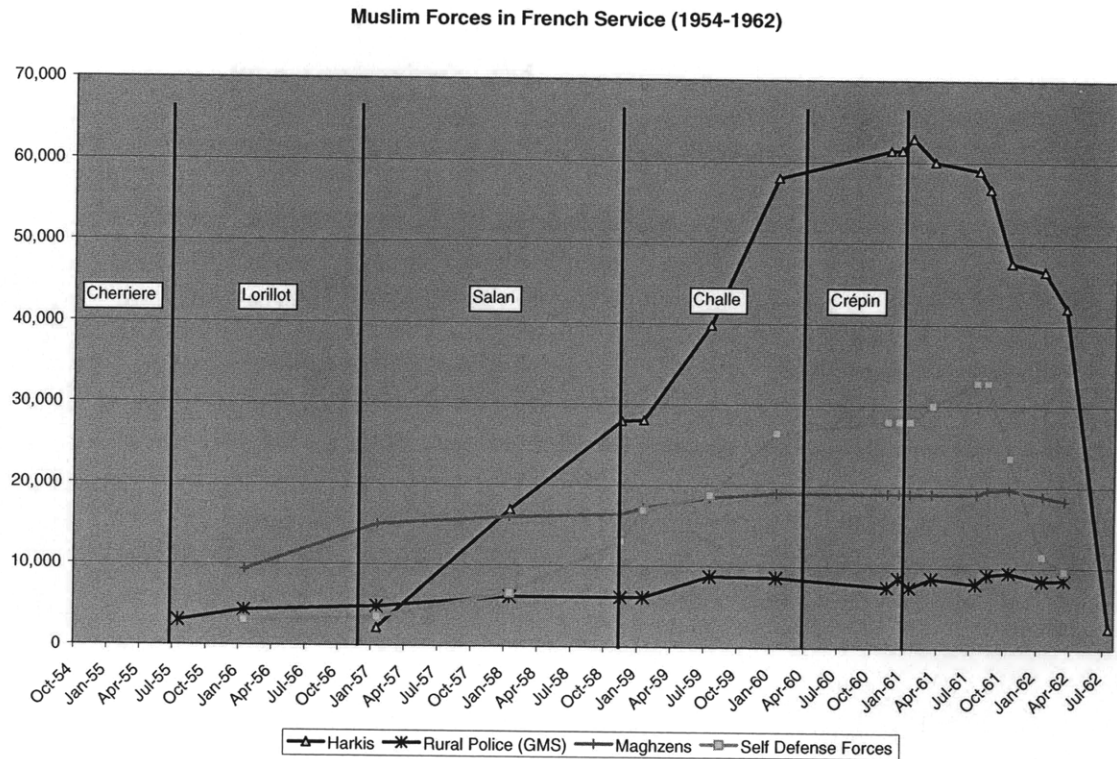
Challe's answer was analogous to Navarre's in 1954. He, like Navarre, continued to support his predecessor's Model 2 political war in the countryside. In order to consummate victory on the campaign level, he decided to reintroduce elements of Model 1 in the form of large scale, offensive maneuver. Challe saw Salan's emphasis on defensive, local pacification and decentralized control as intrinsically flawed; the only way to bring the campaign to a close was to renew pressure on the guerillas and FLN political cadres in their mountainous sanctuaries. Salan's victories in the Battle of the Frontiers made such a final blow appear feasible.

Challe believed that the answer was a rolling offensive that pitted the entire French theater reserve against each of the FLN sanctuaries in succession. Challe's plan reintroduced centralized control and a discernable spatial dimension to the war; progress could now be measured in the Model 1 terms of rates of advance and enemy killed in each targeted sector.

The rolling offensives were to be combined with an intensified Model 2 effort to hold these gains. Challe redoubled Salan's efforts to build local self-defense forces and mobile *harki* units in order to offset anticipated reductions in French manpower. Equally important was a rapid expansion in resettlement of the Muslim population. Resettlement not only made population control feasible, but also made the problem of offensive pacification far easier. Challe added the *commandos de chasse* as yet another way to local manpower to prevent FLN resurgence in cleared areas. Since the purpose of such operations was to sever the links between active guerillas and a passive local population,

⁸⁴⁰ Maurice Challe, *Notre Révolte* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1968), pp. 99.

Challe tended to discount the political and psychological costs of the white terror of the *commandos*.



Challe's offensives produced immediate, positive feedback on the military front. The offensives killed an increasing number of ALN guerrillas and the barriers left the FLN unable to replace these losses. Equally important, the military drove the number of FLN attacks down to levels not seen since the opening months of 1956. The visible deterioration of the FLN and ALN inside Algeria during 1959 and 1960 gave military leaders the impression that decisive victory was within reach. Challe, like Salan and most other military leaders, assumed that the population was essentially passive and that the military collapse of the rebels would lead more or less automatically to the restoration of durable, political authority. Since the population was assumed to be inert and malleable, coercive measures such as resettlement that increased the level of physical

control were assumed to be proof of restored authority. This was a classic illustration of the Model 2 learning trap. Tight coercive control over the Muslim population made it impossible to discern their real sentiments. To measure them, the French would have to loosen their grip with no guarantee that the results would be favorable. In the absence of valid, coincident measures of political progress, the French relied instead on measures of their own performance of task – civic action, resettlement, and psychological operations. All contributed to the illusion of political progress.

Political leaders including de Gaulle viewed these same operational results through a different lens. Where military leaders saw cumulative military progress, civilian leaders saw costly, temporary progress towards an untenable political end state. The steps taken to secure “deep pacification” – offensive pacification, massive resettlement, and the imposition of a white terror – made Algerian consent to French control less and less likely. The only way to retain French control was to maintain hundreds of thousands of troops in Algeria to police a Leninist political order. In de Gaulle’s opinion, the costs, financial and political, of maintaining such an order exceeded the value of the object.⁸⁴¹

These divergent interpretations of the results of the Challe offensives underscored the profound differences between civilian and military understandings of politics. For most French military leaders, the population was a prize to be won by the strongest side in a political war. For civilians, even those with no compunctions about the use of force, some minimal level of popular consent was a prerequisite for the low cost administration of Algeria.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid., Williams, *The Last Great Frenchman*, pp. 400.

The Collision: Model 3 Policy and Model 2 Strategy

Though he saw the widening gap between military and civilian perceptions of progress, de Gaulle opted not to change military strategy directly. Instead, he allowed the military to continue its combination of Model 2 coercive pacification and Model 1 offensive maneuver while he embarked on a Model 3 policy of Algerian self-determination.⁸⁴² He appears to have done so in order either to avoid a direct confrontation or provoke one on his own terms. Challe and other military commanders immediately realized the incompatibility of Model 2 strategy and Model 3 policy. As de Gaulle sought to curtail military influence in Algeria through selective purges and changes of command, the military leaders went into open revolt in response to what they saw as a betrayal of their late war victory. The April 1961 coup attempt was the military's last attempt to salvage what it saw as a Model 2 victory.

While the failed coup marked the end of the military's Model 2 strategy, the suppression of the coup undermined de Gaulle's position. De Gaulle used the coup as an opportunity to reassert civilian control and priorities. De Gaulle had hoped that his military gains, in combination with open elections and engagement with non-FLN elites, might allow France to retain some level of association and the control over key interests.⁸⁴³ All this depended upon developing some legitimate alternative to the FLN. While the Si Salah affair had raised the possibility of a separate peace with dissident rebels, the massive pro-FLN demonstrations in Algiers in December 1960 had underlined

⁸⁴² As in the last phase of the Indochina War, the military command, frustrated by its inability to control the population, sought to break the stalemate by reintroducing Model 1 offensive operations. Since Model 2 and Model 1 shared the same underlying coercive framework, the change from pure Model 2 to some hybrid of Models 1 and 2 was less abrupt than a step from either towards Model 3.

⁸⁴³ These included French military bases, oil reserves, atomic testing ranges and the rights of European citizens.

the obstacles to a third force, political solution. Open negotiations with the FLN proved disastrous; de Gaulle was unable to secure any of his major interests and was forced to concede.

Variations on the Theme: The Role of Independent Variables and Causal Mechanisms in the French Cases

While French behavior in the three cases is consistent with the dominant pattern predicted in Chapter 2, the cases reveal considerable variation around this basic theme. The French did exhibit a strong and durable preference for Model 1 solutions to insurgency; consequently, wartime strategy tended to open with a prolonged “test” of Model 1, followed by a belated shift in the direction of Model 2. Choices of Model 3 were far rarer and more fragile; they generally resulted from some combination of extreme resource scarcity and heavy civilian participation. The interwar period saw the reemergence of bureaucratic interests and the rejection of the heterodox Model 2 and 3 solutions. French behavior in the interwar period was at odds with common sense notions of interwar progress and retention; rather than fixating on its recent experience, the military tended to discard such experience and reset its strategies in accordance with underlying cognitive beliefs and parochial interests.

That said, the French did not march from Model 1 to 2 to 3 in lockstep. Instead, the order and timing of their strategic choice varied considerably within and across cases. In this section we will examine two questions. First, to what extent did changes in the specified independent variables (task pressure, task performance, resource abundance, and civilian participation) explain changes in organizational behavior? Second, how did

changes in independent variables influence strategic choice? Here the question is whether the basic causal mechanisms developed in Chapter 2 explain the connection between the independent variables and observed behavior.

The Military Operational Code, Bureaucratic Interests, and Task Pressure

The theory developed in Chapter 2 suggests that two constants⁸⁴⁴ influence strategic choice and retention: the military operational code (MOC) and bureaucratic interests. The relative influence of each constant depends on the level of task pressure. In total war, when task pressure is high and task performance is synonymous with survival, the influence of the MOC is paramount – militaries are determined but biased problem solvers. In limited war, when task pressure is more modest and task performance is only loosely connected to survival, the MOC remains the leading influence but parochial interests reinforce preference ordering and impede search for alternative strategies. In peacetime, when task pressure is close to zero, bureaucratic interests dominate organizational behavior. In practice, however, bureaucratic interests and professional beliefs often reinforce each other; the bureaucratic motivation to reject Model 3 strategies reinforces cognitive preferences for Model 1 formats.

The variation in task pressure is easiest to isolate in the transitions between the cases. The French Indochina case is a classic case of expeditionary counterinsurgency and modest task pressure. While the MOC appears to have played the leading role in shaping strategic choice, contemporary French debates on strategy also revealed a strong

⁸⁴⁴ These are constant only within the context of military organizations. Different professions have different operational codes and changes in the level of civilian participation reveal these systematic differences in performance evaluation and strategic choice. The bureaucratic motivations cited here are generic – they apply to almost any bureaucratic organization.

distaste for Model 2 and particularly Model 3 strategies that impinged on military autonomy, resources, and prestige. Model 2 strategies thrust the military into the political realm but did so by applying a familiar coercive framework drawn from the operational code. Model 3, by contrast, forced the military to discard the idea that politics was simply war by other means. The move from war to one-way politics was far less jarring than the transition from either to the ambiguous realm of politics as exchange.

Bureaucratic preferences were most evident at the highest levels of the metropolitan defense establishment. Whether in senior officer visits or the deliberations of the Ministry of Defense, senior French military leaders often saw heterodox solutions to counterinsurgency as threats to preparations for Western defense. The depth of feeling suggests that the French military's distaste for was more than an issue of theater priorities or abstract debates about the expected values of various defense contingencies. For the French military establishment, Indochina was more than the "wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time;" it was the wrong kind of war – one destined to distract and damage the modernization and reputation of the military institution.

The drop in task pressure after Dien Bien Phu marked the beginning of an abrupt institutional shift away from counterinsurgency. There is ample evidence that the motives here were primarily bureaucratic. Pent up institutional distaste for counterinsurgency was expressed in a swing in investment from operations to capital modernization. Even as warnings of unrest in North Africa mounted, capital modernization dominated the attention of senior civilian and military decision makers. The postwar debates over the defeat in Indochina suggest a far greater degree of flexibility on the conceptual level. While most officers ignored Leclerc's Model 3

option, the military appeared committed to a candid exploration of the relative merits of Models 1 and 2. The intellectual depth and practical insignificance of the postwar reports on Indochina demonstrate the power of bureaucratic preferences in the absence of task pressure.

The outbreak of the rebellion in Algeria led to an increase in task pressure and the relative weight of the MOC. While senior military and civilian leaders initially resisted a shift back to counterinsurgency and the organizational disruptions it might entail, the rapid expansion in the rebellion soon overcame bureaucratic resistance. The primary influence of task pressure on the Algerian episode was a lagged one; the post-Dien Bien Phu failure to incorporate or generalize the “lessons” of Indochina meant that the French entered Algeria at the conceptual ground floor. The official studies of Indochina clearly identified the weaknesses of Model 1 and suggested that Model 2 formulas might be more effective. Even so, the late Indochina Model 2 initiatives were conspicuously ignored in the opening phases of Algeria; pride of place went instead to various Model 1 strategies that had been proven ineffective over a decade of experience in Indochina.

The Illusion of Familiarity and Learning Traps

The military operational code helps explain two subordinate puzzles of counterinsurgency: the Model 1 default response and the slow recognition of its limits. As noted in the Chapter 2, military reactions to insurgency often take the form of patterned response rather than reasoned choice. Insurgencies exhibit many of the symptoms of conventional war: the presence of antagonistic, armed groups and small scale combat. Though these conflicts lack many of the familiar spatial features of the

conventional battlefield (e.g. front lines, avenues of advance, strongpoints), their core symptoms lead military decision makers to classify insurgencies as small wars. Once insurgency has been labeled a subspecies of conventional war, military leaders are wont to apply conventional strategies and measures of effectiveness. The problem, then, is not the novelty of insurgency but the illusion of familiarity that is the product of common symptoms and professional beliefs.

In Indochina, the illusion of familiarity was at work in the late 1946 transition from Model 3 to Model 1. Most local military leaders saw the Viet Minh as a weak military opponent. The sporadic clashes of the reconquest left no doubt that the conflict was a variety of small war. Rather than allow the Viet Minh to grow in military strength, the key was to seek a “trial of strength”⁸⁴⁵ while the balance clearly favored the French. What these leaders missed and Leclerc understood was the significance and agency of the local population. That silent partner would prove the decisive actor in a decade long trial of strength between the French and the Viet Minh.

In Algeria, misclassification and inappropriate response were almost immediate. General Cherrière saw the All Saints uprising as a small war; contemporary records and his subsequent statements make clear that he considered the events of late 1954 a replay of the Sétif insurrection of May 1945. His Model 1 solution to armed rebellion was direct attack on the rebels. In his mind, these operations would destroy the agents of rebellion and cow the local population into submission. While his strategy, unlike that of Valluy and d’Argenlieu, made some accommodation for the reaction of the population, he shared their basic assumptions about its low significance and essential passivity.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid., Clausewitz, pp. 127.

While the illusion of familiarity may explain inappropriate initial response, it does not explain the tendency to retain Model 1 when that strategy has failed to produce success on the campaign level. The problem here is another product of the operational code - the learning trap. The balance of capabilities in most insurgencies favors the counterinsurgent. For this reason, tactical encounters are structurally one sided; the counterinsurgent typically inflicts losses on the insurgent band and suffers few of his own. Since many of these engagements occur in populated areas, the battles often result in damage to local property or the death of non-combatants. While military leaders are not blind to the significance of these byproducts, the implicit weighting system of the operational code leads them to score such mixed outcomes as net successes. Since most engagements are likely to be scored as “small victories,” and these gains are assumed to be permanent and cumulative, then offensive operations will tend to produce positive feedback and reinforce attachment to Model 1. When small victories fail to produce campaign victory, militaries generally seek to escalate rather than search for alternatives.

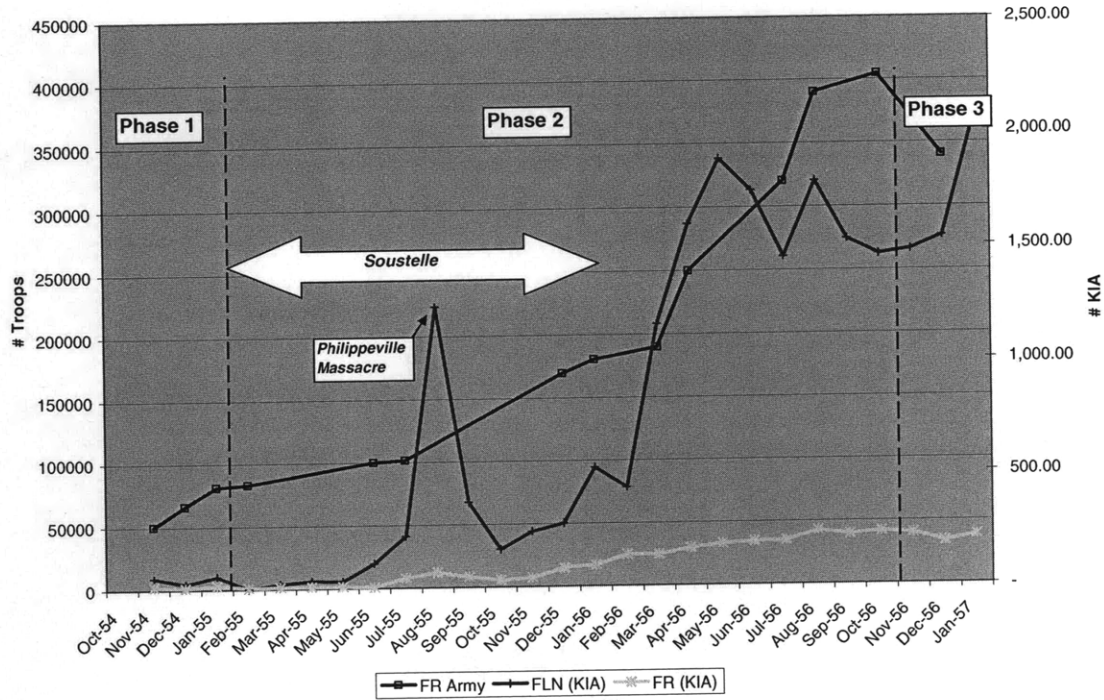
In Indochina, the “small victories” dynamic proved a nearly insuperable hurdle. From 1946 through 1954, every commander in chief of the French forces in Indochina subscribed to the notion that battle, in its minor (pacification operations) or major (set piece battles) forms, was the best way to set the conditions for political success. They assumed that the destruction of Viet Minh guerillas and political cadres would lead a basically passive population to accept the authority of France or the Associated States. Intrawar French attempts to measure their own progress reflect the importance of battle as the central organizing principle of all activities. Victory or defeat, whether in pacification sweeps or more conventional battles, was measured in terms of loss ratios

and physical control of territory. When French forces controlled the field of battle and killed or captured more Vietnamese than they lost, the action was judged a success.⁸⁴⁶ Only when these familiar ratios were clearly reversed, as at Cao Bang or Dien Bien Phu, did the military acknowledge even local defeat. While the more astute commanders recognized the significance of the less tangible, political dimensions of the campaign, contemporary records contain almost no mention of civilian deaths, loss of property, local opinion, or the political byproducts of military operations.

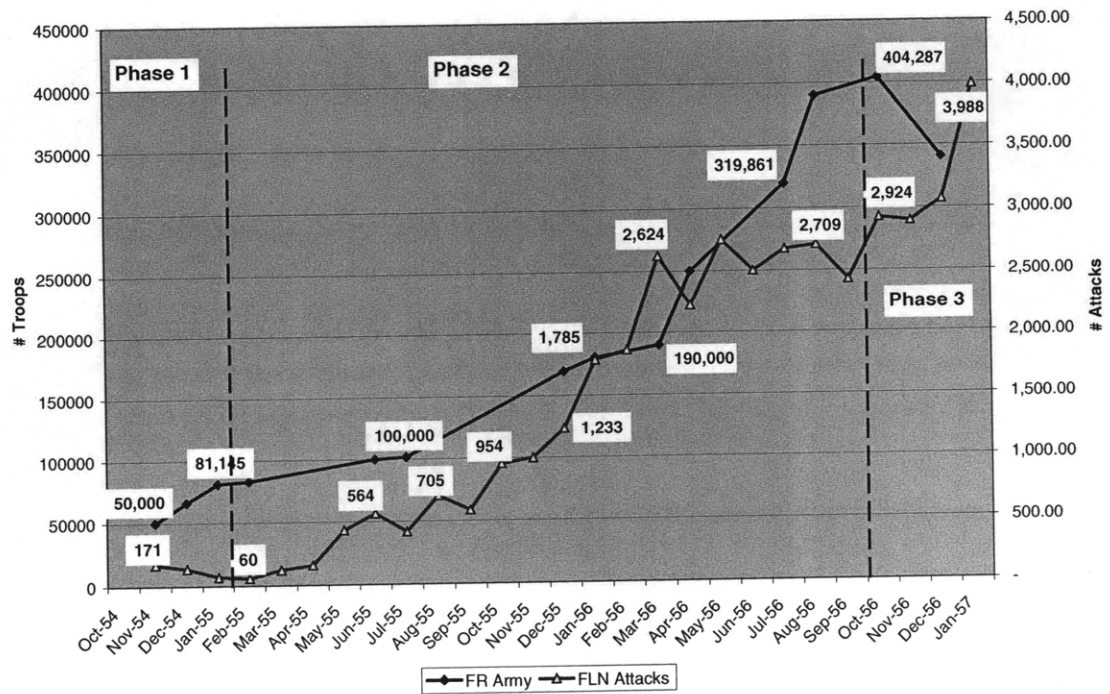
The French struggled with the same issues in the first two years of the Algerian war. The tactical successes of the French army in that period reinforced the military's attachment to Model 1. As the figures below indicate, French losses remained low while enemy losses climbed dramatically. Though Cherrière and his successor Lorillot were not blind to countervailing, negative trends in the level of violence and the size and scope of the FLN movement (see below), they sought to address these problems through material and normative escalation. When vast increases in the number of French troops and the relaxation of controls on military force failed to resolve the issue, Lorillot's reaction was to endorse two classic Model 1 operations: a decapitation strike on Ben Bella and the FLN leadership and the Suez expedition to destroy the rebellion's purported external sponsor. French military behavior in the first two years of the war demonstrates the overweighting of loss ratios (and particularly enemy body counts) and the underweighting of costs of offensive operations. Similarly, it illustrates the military's tendency to delay search until all Model 1 solutions have been exhausted.

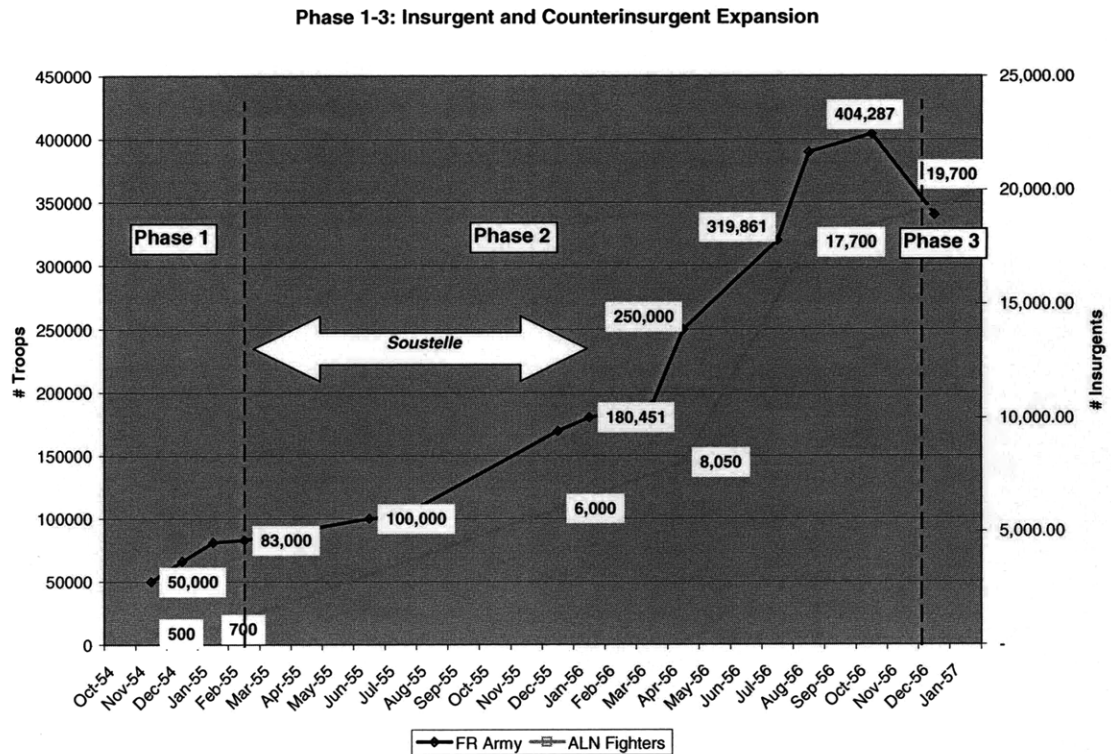
⁸⁴⁶ The memoirs of General Salan demonstrate the tendency, even among experienced and astute commanders, to gravitate towards simple and quantitative measures of operational success and failure. In his accounting of major success and failures of the campaigns, Salan consistently reverted to loss ratios and the control of terrain as the chief performance indicators (Source: Raoul Salan, *Le Viêt-minh mon adversaire*, pp.113, 191, 206, 289, 308, 355, 371).

Phases 1-3: French Troop Levels and Loss Ratios



Phases 1-3: Model 1, Escalation, and Deterioration





On the operational level, the French conduct of the war in Indochina included many examples of brilliantly executed but largely inconsequential conventional maneuvers against an unconventional opponent. Whether in the offensive operations such as Lea (decapitation strike and exploitation against Viet Minh sanctuary in 1947), Lotus (the attack at Hoa Binh in 1951 to cut the Viet Minh territory in two), and Lorraine (raid to sever Viet Minh supply lines and derail Viet Minh offensive of 1952), or in defensive operations such as the pre-Cao Bang border outposts along the Chinese border and later in the “de Lattre Line” fortifications around the Red River delta, the French applied strategies proven in conventional contexts and largely irrelevant to insurgency. When doubts began to mount within the French command from 1952 on, American military observers reinforced the Model 1 interpretation of the Indochina problem. By assailing French passivity and excessive attention to static defense, American officers

pushed the French command to pursue larger scale attacks on the Viet Minh regular army. This return to Model 1 gained momentum as the Americans made continued material aid in 1953 and 1954 contingent on more deliberate offensive operations against what they considered the military center of gravity.

The operational campaigns in Algeria followed a similar if less spectacular course. The first two years of the war were spent in the pursuit of the rebel bands. These operations produced countless small victories and the occasional elimination of a significant rebel leader. As in Indochina, the French command placed great weight on the role of sanctuaries and external sponsors; the Suez expedition, Sakiet and the Battle of the Frontiers were all predicated on the centrality of the external component of the rebellion and the potential for war winning strikes on these targets. When Salan's Model 2 pacification plans failed to rollback the progress of the rebellion, the French military's preferred solution was a return to large scale, offensive maneuver against enemy sanctuaries and troop units. While Challe, like Navarre, elected to retain important pieces of the Model 2 approach, it was the reintroduction of Model 1 style maneuver against armed that was the hallmark of his offensives. It is noteworthy that in later stages of both wars, military frustration with Model 2 pacification did not lead directly to an embrace of Model 3; instead, the military tended to retrace its steps and revive elements of Model 1.

Model 2 and Model 3 strategies introduced new performance measurement challenges. The struggle for the population was more difficult to measure and the absence of clear performance feedback often led to a reliance on measures of activity rather than effect. Unable to measure the true sentiments of the population, leaders often cited their own actions – the number of economic projects completed, number of

psychological operations conducted, etc. - as evidence of progress. In other cases, coercive Model 2 strategies led to the fabrication of positive feedback. When Roger Trinquier used his D.P.U. organization to stage pro-French demonstrations or influence voting behavior, he was using population control measures to compel demonstrations of support for the regime. Both problems – the fixation on the good acts of the counterinsurgency forces or the use of coercion to produce favorable feedback – tended to delay recognition of the limits of Model 2 strategies.

In Indochina, this measurement problem may also explain the military's unease with Leclerc's the mixed strategy and their ambivalent reaction to early psychological operations initiatives. Where it was relatively easy to score conventional military operations, Model 2 and particularly Model 3 strategies tended to focus attention on unfamiliar, intangible and lagged performance measures. While Leclerc argued that an uncomfortable condominium was preferable to a "holy war" with the Viet Minh, he had no way to prove this to skeptics. Just as a commercial negotiator cannot be sure of what he has obtained until a contract has been signed, the Model 3 strategist cannot predict with certainty the shape of the political endgame or its durability. With little idea of how to measure either their own efforts in these areas, or the effects of these efforts on the course of the campaign, it is hardly surprising that most officers clung to the simple and concrete accounting system of battle and resisted the drift into the abstract and ambiguous realm of Model 2 or Model 3 politics.

The earlier adoption and greater prominence of Model 2 and Model 3 strategies in Algeria made the measurement of political performance more acute. Soustelle faced the same set of issues that Leclerc had in the early phases of Indochina. His formula was

rooted in the idea of political consent; he was convinced that military repression alone could not secure the willing cooperation or even the abstention of the Algerian population. His attempts to reach out to local notables and leading Muslim nationalists were evidence of his belief that consent and cooptation were preferable to elimination. Like Leclerc, however, he could not demonstrate immediate, tangible gains. Instead, his formula proved vulnerable to FLN action and resource shocks; the Philippeville massacre gave his opponents proof that Model 3 strategies were invalid and abundant resources made a return to Model 1 escalation feasible.

With the rise of Model 2 political war in 1957, the military faced a different set of measurement problems. Though Salan and other Model 2 advocates had identified the population as the center of gravity, they found it difficult to track progress towards “deep pacification” (*pacification en profondeur*).⁸⁴⁷ The clearest and most tangible measures remained those of Model 1 – loss ratios and territorial control. Consequently they looked to measures of their own activity as proxies for progress in pacification. The number of schools and medical clinics built, jobs produced, and the like were cited as indirect evidence of pacification. When pressed for direct evidence of popular sentiment, Salan and others pointed to the “spontaneous” demonstrations by Muslims in Algiers on May 13, 1958 and the results of the September 1958 referendum. In both cases, however, the evidence of political progress had been tainted by the military’s own success in coercive population control. When the DPU was used to turn out Muslim demonstrators, it was proof of organization and control rather than genuine sentiment. The unintended price of Model 2 population control was even deeper ignorance of local sentiment.

⁸⁴⁷ Jacques Massu, *La Vraie Bataille d’Alger* (Paris: Plon, 1971), pp. 127.

In both Indochina and Algeria, the framing of counterinsurgency as battle comes through in the French military's musings on the role of the local population. Few senior commanders, with the exception of Leclerc and possibly Salan, believed that the Vietnamese population might play a significant and active role in determining the outcome of the conflict. While Saintenay,⁸⁴⁸ Paul Mus,⁸⁴⁹ at least one senior military commander⁸⁵⁰ had observed as early as 1945 that large portions of the Vietnamese population fully supported the Viet Minh cause, the French high command tended to treat the population as essentially inert, human terrain.⁸⁵¹ Early French strategies rested on a belief that pacification was a straightforward problem of liberation; once freed from Viet Minh coercion, the vast majority of the population would more or less automatically accept a return to some variant of the old order. Even as some more junior leaders began to recognize the significance of the population, they consistently overstated their ability to shape local opinion. Whether in their conduct of psychological operations, resettlement, or in their support for the highland *maquis*, even the most progressive officers assumed that the right mixture of positive and negative incentives and ideas could compel the population to accept French authority. The isolated successes of French pacification among the southern religious sects and the hill tribes of Tonkin encouraged a misplaced confidence in the French ability to generate lasting political support.

⁸⁴⁸ Jean Saintenay, *Histoire d'une Paix Manquée* (Paris: Fayard, 1967), pp. 63-70.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid., Martel, *Leclerc: Le soldat et le politique*, pp. 357-362.

⁸⁵⁰ Henri Lorillot, "Objet: Prestige de Ho Chi Minh, 25 mars 1947" in *Indochine 1947*, pp. 187.

⁸⁵¹ General Valluy's statements on strategy provide examples of the prevailing belief in an inert and malleable local population (see General Valluy, "Fiche sur la situation en Cochinchine, 4 mai 1947," in *Indochine 1947: Règlement politique or solution militaire?*, pp. 191; *ibid.*, Valluy, *Indochine 1947*, pp. 303. In his postwar writings on Indochina, Colonel Nemo argued that effective counterinsurgency strategy depended on an "attentive study of 'social terrain.'" (Source: Paul et Marie-Catherine Villatoux, *La République et son armée face au "péril subversif,"* pp. 322)

In Algeria, assumptions about the significance and agency of the population followed a similar path. During the first winter of the rebellion, General Cherrière and the leading civilian voices in the security apparatus saw the guerillas and their external sponsors as far more important than the population as a whole; the key was to identify and eliminate the rebel movement rather than protect or influence a population that was considered neutral and passive. Soustelle challenged these assumptions in the early part of his tenure, arguing that the population was centrally important, largely dissatisfied and susceptible to French outreach. With Philippeville and Soustelle's departure,⁸⁵² the focus returned to the attack on the guerillas.

The rise of Salan led to a change in the perceived importance of the population but not its agency. Salan and his disciples identified the political wing of the FLN as the principal target of the military effort and the passive population as a complementary target of French influence. Advocates of *guerre révolutionnaire* assumed that some combination of psychological operations, population control, and economic development would cause the Muslim population to reject the rebels and rally to the French cause.⁸⁵³ Since coercive control was seen as the functional equivalent of consent, little energy was put into measuring genuine political sentiment.

De Gaulle's move to self-determination in 1959 marked a return to Soustelle's early emphasis on the active role of the local population. Like Soustelle, de Gaulle argued that long term stability depended on the tacit agreement of the local population.

⁸⁵² The hardening of Soustelle after Philippeville makes generalizations about his opinions perilous. After his tenure as Governor General, Soustelle began to identify ever more closely with the *pied noir* cause. By 1959, de Gaulle and Soustelle had effectively switched places; de Gaulle was now the champion of Muslim choice while Soustelle was the opponent of political concession.

⁸⁵³ As the French discovered in Algeria, Model 2 strategies could suppress violence but only temporarily and at great and essentially perpetual cost. For a more detailed discussion of the efficacy of Model 2 strategies of population control, see Chapter 2, pp. 108-112.

The French military leadership under Salan and Challe never accepted this assumption; to the end they argued that physical control of the population and its forcible separation from the rebel bands were proof of deep pacification.

While the French military in Indochina and Algeria tended to understate the significance and agency of the population, there were notable exceptions. In Indochina, prescient leaders including Leclerc, Salan, Lorillot and Morlière, recognized the active role played by the local population in the political struggle. From this recognition flowed an interest in the local preferences and political actors in Vietnam – considerations that would have been inconsequential in a world in which the population was neutral, passive and malleable. Similarly, a handful of military actors in the Algerian war reached the same conclusions: Monteil, Parlange, Ailleret. Such recognition was the key to using violence to restore state authority. The acknowledgment of limited agency was a prerequisite for effective negotiation with other actors in the political competition. So long as the military saw the problem as one of defeating all political competitors militarily, it could not contemplate the steps necessary to assemble the minimum winning coalition necessary to restore state authority.

Whether in Indochina or Algeria, these were minority opinions. Even when senior commanders entertained doubts about the theories of influence embedded in Model 1 or Model 2, they had difficulty convincing other members of the military establishment of the logic of consent or exchange. For the vast majority of officers, politics, seen through the lens of the operational code, was simply an extension of war by other means. Individual insight, even at the highest level of command, proved insufficient to overcome the collective skepticism of the military profession.

Task Performance: Success and Failure in French Wartime Adaptation

As noted in Chapter 2, perceptions of success and failure are central to the decision to explore alternative strategies. First, organizations will accept the costs and risks of organizational search only when they believe that the current strategy has failed. Second, either episodic failure or negative trends can stimulate search. Though the counterinsurgent's military advantages make episodic failure rare in counterinsurgency, it is a far more powerful spur to action than trends or stalemate. By contrast, negative trends or stalemate (the prolonged absence of campaign success) are common in insurgency but are far less powerful stimulants of search. Third, neither episodic failure nor negative performance trends are valid predictors of the order or extent of search; failure triggers search but does little to guide it.

The French experience in Indochina highlights the powerful but indeterminate role of success and failure in explaining organizational change. Military success undoubtedly delayed the search for alternative strategies on multiple occasions; military failure accelerated search but did not dictate its course or extent. Leclerc's reconquest of Indochina in 1945 and 1946, by his own admission a feat of military stagecraft, tended to narrow rather than broaden the focus of those intent on restoring French sovereignty. If French arms had delivered the initial prize, then military action could, on a greater scale and in greater numbers, restore full political control. De Lattre's string of lopsided victories in 1951 restored French confidence at the cost of strategic search. The outcome of these battles made the idea of a counterinsurgency campaign rooted in large unit battle believable once more.

This same tendency to delay search in favor of exploitation and escalation was present in pacification operations as well. As a number of observers noted, large scale pacification operations were military riskless; large units could pummel any Viet Minh units that were ensnared in cordon and search operations. So long as such operations produced consistent, positive results on the military balance sheet, and the command believed that such gains were cumulative, then the strategy appeared sound. That these operations failed to produce lasting, positive gains encouraged French commanders to turn to exploitation and escalation rather than first order search. Only very late in the war, after the undoing of countless “successful” clearance operations, did the French begin to experiment with approaches to pacification (G.A.M.O.s, maquis, resettlement) that emphasized the “hold” phase of “clear and hold” operations. Even so, these initiatives remained the supporting rather than the primary effort; when operational needs forced the high command to choose, conventional operations were the first priority, offensive clearance operations the second, and administrative or political consolidation a distant third.⁸⁵⁴

Acute, episodic failure did spur organizational change, but the order and extent of the ensuing organizational search varied considerably. In theory, the French collapse at Cao Bang in October 1950 was an opportunity for a fundamental reassessment of French strategy. The scale of the defeat, the realization of the impact of Chinese aid to the Viet Minh, and the clear validation of many of the criticisms spelled out in the Revers report of July 1949, made a major strategic reappraisal a logical next step. In practice, conventional defeat at Cao Bang led to conventional military escalation rather than

⁸⁵⁴ Yves Gras' account of the failure of Salan's GAMO initiative reveals the implicit priority system. (Sources: Yves Gras, *Histoire de la guerre d'Indochine*, pp. 461-462; Raoul Salan, *Le Viêt-Minh Mon Adversaire*, pp. 309)

extensive strategic search. De Lattre's policy focused French energies on improvements in military organization and morale and major increases in manpower and materiel. De Lattre's victories in the defensive battles of 1951 appeared to validate an approach rooted in conventional response and fed by American capital and Vietnamese manpower.

The major shocks of Salan's tenure, notably the withdrawal from Hoa Binh and the Viet Minh northern offensives of 1952-3, prompted conventional exploitation and strategic experimentation. The operations at Na San and Operation Lorraine were variations and extensions of military ideas developed earlier in the war. Though ably executed, they reflected the French command's ongoing fixation with the problems of set piece battle. To his credit, Salan, by far the most experienced Indochina hand to command the Expeditionary Corps, showed greater interest in the politics than any of his predecessors and sponsored several Model 2 experiments in population control. Campaign stalemate and the steady deterioration in French military fortunes from 1952 to 1953 led to Salan's replacement and a decisive return to the familiar but unsuccessful combination of conventional battle and military pacification.⁸⁵⁵

Failure played a split role in the brief interwar period. While the defeat at Dien Bien Phu and surrender at Geneva provoked serious professional debate, the impact of that debate on the organization's behavior was minimal. In peacetime, failure was capable of stimulating an intellectual inquiry but incapable of overriding the organization's distaste for the proposed Model 2 solutions to revolutionary war. The combination of intellectual debate and organizational backsliding demonstrates the power of bureaucratic preferences in an environment where task pressure is largely absent.

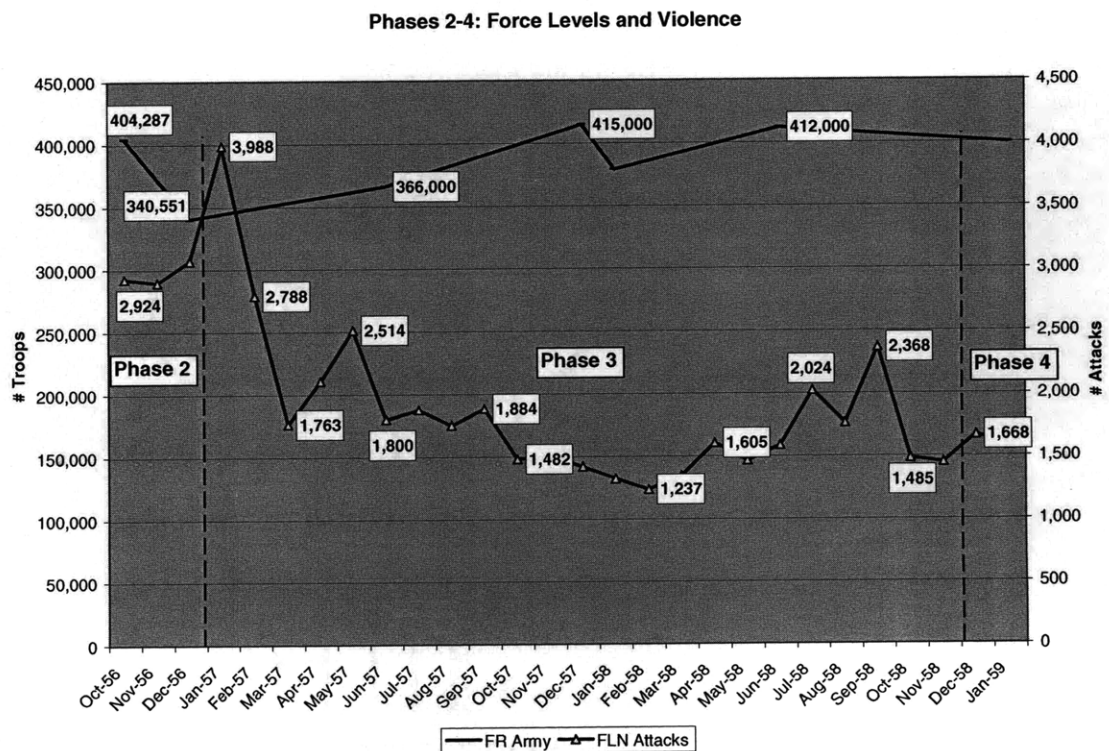
⁸⁵⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the effects of Model 2 strategies, see Chapter 2, pp. 108-112.

Episodic failure was much rarer in Algeria than in Indochina for structural reasons. The FLN lacked the means to build a conventional army capable of inflicting Cao Bang or Dien Bien Phu style battlefield defeats on the French army; the French army for its part had introduced four to five times the number of troops they had in Indochina. In the absence of such shocks, the French typically confronted some combination of episodic success and stalemate. Major operational successes in the Battle of Algiers, the Battle of the Frontiers, and the Challe offensives strongly reinforced the command's attachment to prevailing strategies. These successes were typically followed by attempts to replicate or generalize the winning formula; here again, the tendency was to overweight military feedback and discount the political costs of such operations. The French responded to the paradox of episodic success and campaign stalemate through escalation. The leading examples of this were Lorillot's post-Soustelle escalation and Challe's offensives. What the Algerian war did show was the outsized influence of militarily trivial defeats on state policy. The massacre of roughly one hundred Europeans at Philippeville buried Soustelle's Model 3 policy and opened the way for a return to Model 1 strategy and escalation. Similarly, it was a single bombing incident at Sakiet, and not the larger operational victory in the Battle of the Frontiers, that exerted the greatest influence on French policy.⁸⁵⁶

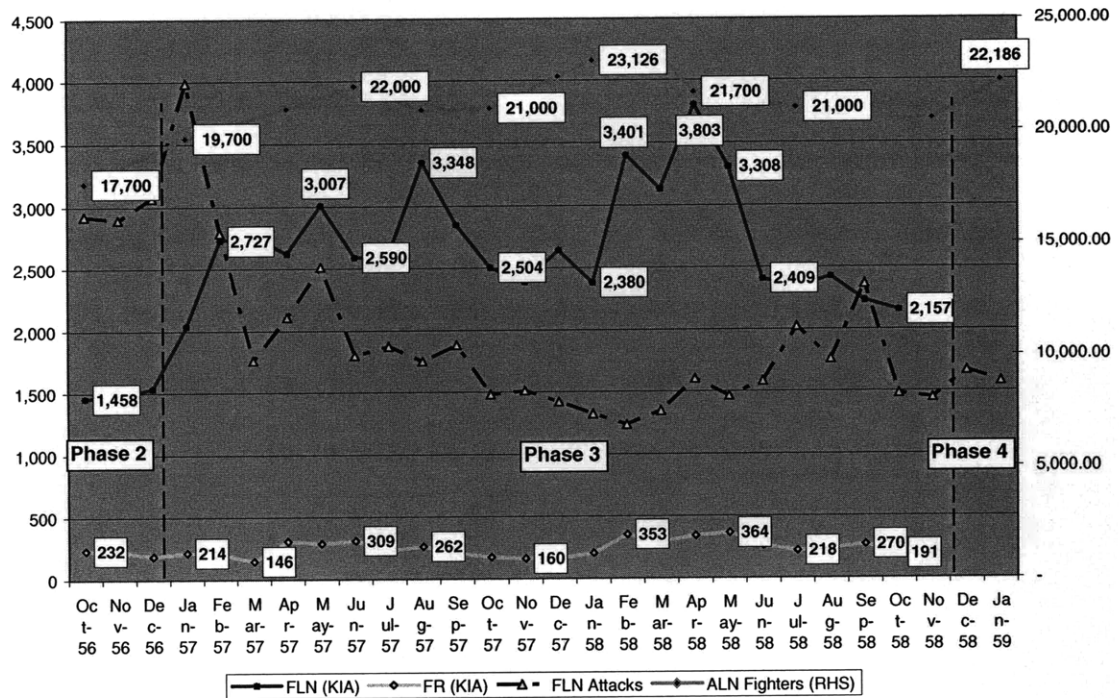
The rarity of episodic failure made French strategic choice even more dependent on the evaluation of performance trends. French reactions in the first two years of the war suggest that loss ratios and enemy body counts were given greater weight than

⁸⁵⁶ The Sakiet incident set in motion a chain of events that led to the military seizure of power in Algiers in May 1958. This bloodless coup, brought on by hints of civilian negotiations with the FLN, led to the collapse of the 4th Republic and the ascent of de Gaulle. For a more detailed account of this episode, see page 366.

measures of population security or social stability (numbers of attacks, etc.). During the following two years, Salan and the Model 2 advocates were forced to reconcile contradictory trends: highly favorable loss ratios (averaging more than 11:1 over the two year span), stubbornly high levels of violence, and an undiminished ALN guerilla force. In both cases, the response to ambiguous feedback was to pursue Model 1 escalation of some form. In 1956, the answer was to increase manpower and ruthlessness; in 1959 the answer was to return to large scale offensive action against enemy sanctuaries.



Phases 2-4: Loss Ratios, Attacks, and ALN Strength



Resources and Adaptation

The theory predicts that resource scarcity will accelerate search and increase the probability that militaries will adopt Model 3 strategies. By contrast, resource abundance will delay search and encourage a slow progression from Model 1 to escalation to Model 2. The influence of resources on strategic choice does not end with the initial response; positive and negative resource shocks can trigger strategic change. Positive resource shocks will tend to drive militaries into Model 1 or Model 2 strategies; negative resource shocks will tend to drive militaries towards Model 3 alternatives.

Changes in resource levels influence strategic choice in three ways: budget constraints, bureaucratic influence, and factor endowment effects. First, resource levels dictate the range of choices available. When resources are abundant, choice is

unconstrained and organizations will be guided by their beliefs and preferences. When resources are very scarce, budget constraints render Model 1 and Model 2 strategies difficult and militaries are often forced to explore Model 3 alternatives. Second, resource levels affect the bureaucratic influence of the military vis-à-vis its civilian leadership. When resources flow primarily into military hands, this has the effect of amplifying military influence in the development and implementation of strategy. Resource abundance tends to amplify military influence and by extension the influence of the MOC. Third, the mix of resources provided, the factor endowment effects, can influence strategic choice. The resources provided (capital equipment, manpower, and cash) can make certain choices more attractive than others. All things being equal, the provision of manpower will encourage Model 1 and Model 2 strategies; extreme manpower scarcity will tend to force militaries to develop local forces, co-opt local actors and explore Model 3 solutions. The provision of large volumes of conventional military equipment will reinforce the Model 1 instinct. When constraints on force levels and military equipment increase the proportion of cash in the resource flow, militaries are more likely to pursue Model 3 strategies focused on the cooptation of local actors.

The Indochina case also provides evidence of the three mechanisms that link changes in resource levels to strategic choice. Leclerc's behavior and his contemporary statements strongly suggest that resource scarcity played a powerful role in his willingness to engage in negotiations with the Viet Minh and the Chinese Nationalists. The removal of this binding constraint on strategy contributed to d'Argenlieu and Valluy's reversal of course and subsequent pursuit of a policy of military confrontation. Once the resources were available to play out the conventional solution to the Viet Minh

problem, the French command dropped political-military strategy (Model 3) in favor of a military test of strength (Model 1).⁸⁵⁷

The Indochina case also suggests is just how low the resource threshold for Model 1 response may be. With the 5,000 troops available in October 1945, there were few obvious alternatives to Leclerc's Model 3 strategy of "negotiating while fighting"; by October 1946, with just 90,000 troops available to pacify a country of 24,000,000 and subdue a Viet Minh army of roughly equal strength (80,000-100,000),⁸⁵⁸ a uniformed High Commissioner and his senior commanders were willing to engage in a military showdown. While advocates of confrontation acknowledged the need for additional forces to complete a military pacification campaign, the possession of even a fraction of the desired forces was enough to encourage moves towards confrontation. By comparison, Leclerc estimated in January 1947 that it would take a minimum of 350,000 troops to reconquer Indochina by force. Just to restore the *modus vivendi* and seek a negotiated solution, he estimated that 115,000 troops (100,000 European) would be necessary.

If Indochina showcased the impact of resource scarcity on strategic choice, Algeria demonstrated the impact of resource abundance. Even in the opening months of the rebellion, the French military had at its disposal a force twelve times larger than the one available to Leclerc in the reconquest of Indochina.⁸⁵⁹ Abundant and rising

⁸⁵⁷ Here, as in many other areas, dissenting opinions were present. The flow of French forces into Indochina in 1946 did not lead Leclerc to change his opinion on the importance of negotiation. General Morlière, one of Valluy's subordinate commanders in the 1946 uprisings, sought to restore the *modus vivendi* before events and pressure from the *Général* made confrontation unavoidable. What is clear is that the advocates of confrontation won the argument, not only in the 1946 but on a number of occasions thereafter.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochina, 1945-1946*, pp. 96.

⁸⁵⁹ Depending upon accounting conventions, the French garrison in Algeria in October 1954 numbered 57,000; Leclerc had at his disposal 4,500 troops at the start of pacification in Cochinchina. The relative

manpower made a Model 1 response feasible and almost automatic. While Soustelle did explore a Model 3 alternative between February and August 1955, this change came early in the escalatory cycle and was imposed over the objections of leading military commanders. Rising manpower levels provided an attractive alternative to Soustelle's formula. Though Philippeville was the proximate cause of the swing from Soustelle's Model 3 experiments to Model 1, it was the ready availability of French manpower that made Model 1 escalation so seductive.

In both Indochina and Algeria, resource flows influenced the weight of military opinion in the policy process. The raw data on French spending in Indochina gives some sense of the mismatch between military and civilian spending. Though the balance fluctuated over the course of the war,⁸⁶⁰ military spending accounted for roughly 95% of total French spending in Indochina.⁸⁶¹ The military tended to exert monopoly power over the actual disbursement of those funds. By manipulating various aspects of the funding requests, the military tended to block civil oversight of military spending.⁸⁶² The military skew of spending was even more pronounced in the case of the nominally independent of the government of the Associated States; military spending consumed 70% of overall

numerical advantage in the opening months of the Algerian war was amplified by the scale and concentration of the FLN movement. The FLN organization still numbered less than 1,000 and was overwhelmingly concentrated in two small and isolated regions of Algeria. By contrast, Leclerc had to confront scattered resistance by a much larger Viet Minh organization (80,000-100,000) across the entire expanse of Indochina (Source: Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochina, 1945-1946*, pp. 96).

⁸⁶⁰ Two estimates of the civil-military split in spending, one for 1949 and the other in 1952, reveal roughly similar results. In 1949, combined civil spending accounted for 2.01% of French spending; in 1952, total civil spending reached 4.78% of total spending. A breakdown of the total cost of the Indochina war (1945-1955) suggests a substantially larger percentage of civil spending – 22%. (Source: Hugues Tertrais, *La piastre et le fusil: Le coût de la guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954* (Paris: Comité pour l'histoire économique et financière de la France, 2002), pp. 361-362, 542, 569)

⁸⁶¹ Hugues Tertrais, *La piastre et le fusil: Le coût de la guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954* (Paris: Comité pour l'histoire économique et financière de la France, 2002), pp. 361.

⁸⁶² Ibid., Tertrais, pp. 281.

government spending by the Associated States by 1954.⁸⁶³ The skewed flow of resources reinforced the military's de facto policy dominance in Indochina.

During the first four years of the war in Algeria, the flow of resources reinforced military control and bureaucratic influence. In 1955, French military expenditures in Algeria were over five times the level of civil expenditures in the territory.⁸⁶⁴ The rapid influx of military forces displaced civilian administration, particularly in the rural areas. Civil administrators lacked the resources and the coercive tools to confront the problems of administration and counterinsurgency; an increasingly muscular French garrison simply assumed many of the administrative functions of the civil administration. In this context, the passage of the special powers and the delegation of civil authority to specified military commanders set only formalized the de facto militarization of French rule in Algeria.

De Gaulle's attempts to restore civil control from 1958 on had a significant resource component. The Constantine Plan marked the beginning of a shift from predominantly military spending to a more balanced distribution of funds. The ratio of civilian to military spending in Algeria rose from 1:5 in 1955 to roughly 1:2 in 1959 and 1960.⁸⁶⁵ This shift in funding priorities, combined with active efforts to remove the French army from politics, began to chip away at the military's near monopoly on administrative power in Algeria.

⁸⁶³ Ibid., Tertrais, pp. 238.

⁸⁶⁴ Jean-Charles Asselain, "Boulet Colonial" et redressement économique (1958-1962)" in Jean-Pierre Rioux, *La guerre d'Algérie et les français: Colloque de l'Institut d'histoire du temps présent* (Paris: Fayard, 1990), pp. 296.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid., Asselain, pp. 296; Daniel Lefevre makes a similar cost estimate for 1959: 800 billion French Francs in military spending (equivalent to \$11.2 billion in 2006 USD) and 400 billion FF in non-military spending (equivalent to \$5.6 billion in 2006 USD). This total represented close to 20% of French government spending in that year (Source: Daniel Lefevre, "Le coût de la guerre d'Algérie" in *La guerre d'Algérie au miroir des décolonisations françaises, mélanges en honneur de Charles Robert Ageron* (Paris: Société française d'histoire d'Outre-Mer, 2000), pp. 501-514).

The third causal mechanism – factor endowment effects - strongly influenced the pattern of French strategy and the French operational innovation in Indochina.

Throughout the war, the French command lacked the manpower necessary to prosecute its preferred strategy of conventional war and military pacification. Many of the policy shifts from de Lattre on revolved around attempts to address the manpower shortfall. Vietnamization, in its many forms, was the primary answer. The French hoped that the development of a robust, Vietnamese national army would enable them to transfer the unenviable pacification mission and concentrate the Expeditionary Corps for decisive battle. The *jaunissement* of the Expeditionary Corps, and the expanded use of Legionnaires and North African troops, were attempts to address chronic shortfalls in French replacements. Even the GCMA/GMI resistance groups could be construed as an attempt to develop solutions to the chronic manpower shortage. These operations offered the possibility of French control or at least contestation of large area of northern and western Tonkin at the cost of a very small French cadre investment.⁸⁶⁶

The materiel provided shaped the French response in Indochina, particularly on the level of operational routines. The equipment the French had on hand in 1945, and the aid flows they received from the Americans from 1950 on, drove the French down specific adaptive paths. The availability of large numbers of surplus American landing craft and amphibious tractors made possible the *Dinassaut* and amphibious unit innovations of the early Indochina war.⁸⁶⁷ The surge in American military aid from 1950 on transformed the Expeditionary Corps from a capital poor to a capital rich force. In his

⁸⁶⁶ Lieutenant-colonel Michel David, *Guerre Secrète en Indochine: Les maquis autochtones face au Viêt-Minh, 1950-1954* (Paris: Lavauzelle, 2005), pp. 373.

⁸⁶⁷ Victor Croizat, *The Brown Water Navy: The River and Coastal War in Indo-China and Vietnam, 1948-1972* (Poole, UK: Blandford Press, 1984).

memoirs, General Navarre highlighted the influence of American materiel on French military practice:

American aid was also a fact that the command was obliged to accept no matter what. The nature of the materiel that was bestowed upon us – and which had been developed for an entirely different form of war – gave our forces certain ineluctable characteristics: if it gave us power, it came at the cost of great weight. Once engaged in this way, it was practically impossible to break free.⁸⁶⁸

The growing availability of transport aircraft from 1950 on supported a rapid expansion in airborne operations. The fortified camps at Na San and Dien Bien Phu were in some sense the ultimate French response to capital abundance and labor scarcity. By building fortified outposts in remote areas, and supplying them exclusively by air, the French appeared to have found a way to force decisive battle on favorable terms. Generous American transfers of aircraft, artillery made the fortified camps a logical answer to dilemma of area control.

The French military labored under much the same constraints in the early phases of the Algerian war. In 1954, army units in Algeria still resembled late Second World War mechanized formations. In the mountainous terrain of the FLN base areas, however, the firepower and road mobility advantages of this model became liabilities. Even before the outbreak of the rebellion, however, senior military leaders were working to modify local organizations to fit the needs of the theater. Most of these initiatives involved the substitution of mules for wheeled transport and the decision to discard a good portion of the heavy equipment of the standard formations. While these reforms had not taken effect by November 1954, the French soon managed to reconfigure many of their units to lighten these units and improve off road mobility. From 1956 on, the military equipment stock had a far less significant effect on strategic choice than it had in Indochina. Absent

⁸⁶⁸ Henri Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine (1953-1954)* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1956), pp. 318.

the fire hose of American equipment transfers, French strategy was more a product of choice than of material inputs.

The Indochina case also suggests the presence of powerful “window effects.” The expectation of reductions in manpower led military leaders to launch military operations while the troops were still available. At a number of critical junctures in the Indochina war, the temporary dispatch of French forces encouraged the French command to do exactly this. General Valluy launched his northern offensive of 1947 in anticipation of the loss of a large portion of his forces to rotation at the end of that year. Similarly, Alessandri’s drive to pacify the Red River delta in 1950 was in part a response to two sets of window effects; the arrival of French reinforcements in the wake of the Revers report, and the looming arrival of the Chinese Communists in northern Tonkin. The temporary availability of additional forces and the prospect of Chinese intervention made rapid pacification in the delta an imperative in 1949 and 1950. The French government’s grudging dispatch of an additional 20,000 reinforcements to General de Lattre in 1951 came with the proviso that the troops would need to leave Indochina by July 1952.⁸⁶⁹ This temporary surge in manpower, combined with growing American pressure to resume the strategic offensive, drove de Lattre to launch the risky offensive at Hoa Binh in the fall of 1951. In all these cases, anticipated changes in the balance of forces, and particularly the availability of friendly troops influenced not only the timing but the substance of French military plans.

Similar window effects were present in the later phases of the Algerian war. In anticipation of cuts in French force levels, Challe mounted a series of large scale offensive operations in 1959 and 1960 designed to deliver a final blow to the FLN.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid., Salan, pp. 222.

While the plan relied heavily on the French forces, Challe launched a major expansion in local force development. Though his resources were far greater and his opponent far weaker, Challe faced a structurally similar problem to de Lattre's in 1950. If French forces levels were set to drop, the key was to deliver the knock out blow while they were still available. Once this had been done, and the countryside had been cleared, the task of holding these areas could be transferred to local self-defense forces. In both cases, a closing manpower window prompted the senior military leader to launch Model 1 offensive operations and raise ever larger numbers of native troops to secure those gains.

Civilian Participation

According to the theory, high civilian participation accelerates search and increases the probability that militaries explore Model 3 solutions. Conversely, low civilian participation delays search and encourages prolonged exploitation of Model 1 and Model 2.

Civilian participation operates through three causal mechanisms. First, civilian contestation increases the likelihood that strategy will be the product of deliberate choice rather than patterned response. By forcing military leaders to explain their reasoning, civilians increase the probability that false analogies will be exposed and inappropriate responses avoided. Second, civilian participation makes possible a parallel evaluation of campaign performance and an independent exploration of alternative strategies. Civilians weigh the same operational results differently, placing greater emphasis on the feedback that the MOC discounts. This may lead to an accelerated recognition of the limits of Models 1 and 2. Third, the particular expertise of civilian politicians makes them more

likely to recognize the significance of exchange and two way politics in counterinsurgency. While military leaders tend to see insurgencies as small wars, politicians are more likely to see the same conflicts as violent political contests. The politician's cognitive point of origin and his familiarity with norms of exchange place him closer to Model 3 strategies than the professional soldier.

The French cases support these theoretical predictions. In Indochina and Algeria, Model 3 strategies coincided with the high points in civilian participation in strategy. Leclerc's early initiatives relied heavily on the input of his civilian advisers Saintenay and Mus. Soustelle's appointment and subsequent policies were the expression of the desire of civilian elites to reimpose civilian priorities and judgment on the conflict. Sharp declines in civilian participation were associated with swings from Model 3 towards Models 1 and Model 2. In Indochina, the departure of Leclerc and his group of civilian advisers was followed by a move from Model 3 condominium to Model 1 confrontation. The resignation of Soustelle's most liberal advisers, Tillion and Monteil, in the summer of 1955 marked the beginning of the shift from Model 3 to Model 1.⁸⁷⁰

The Algerian resettlement crisis in 1959 and 1960 is the clearest evidence that the link between civilian participation and Model 3 choice is causal rather than simply correlative. Civilian leaders and the S.A.S. leadership sought to challenge the growth of resettlements on the grounds that it would pauperize and alienate the Muslim population. Challe and the French military command refused, arguing that resettlement was central to their military operations and that population control as opposed to consent was the goal.

⁸⁷⁰ Pierre Miquel, *La guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), pp. 186.

This is a clear case of parallel evaluation by civilian administrators, albeit one negated by military disobedience.⁸⁷¹

In Indochina, early civilian input temporarily dispelled the illusion of familiarity and forestalled the adoption of Model 1. Though Leclerc ultimately adopted a Model 3 strategy, his earliest evaluations were much closer to Model 1 orthodoxy. Writing in late August 1945, Leclerc, like de Gaulle, d'Argenlieu, and General MacArthur,⁸⁷² expressed confidence that the key to restoring control was a robust show of force.⁸⁷³ It was only after he received detailed feedback from French civilian advisers inside the country that Leclerc began to revise his approach and develop a Model 3 strategy. The information provided by Jean Cédile, Jean Saintenay, and Paul Mus lay outside the boundaries of traditional military attention; all three pointed to the realities of resurgent Vietnamese nationalism, the high levels of popular support for the Viet Minh, rising ethnic tensions between Europeans and natives, and Vietnamese fears of Chinese occupation.⁸⁷⁴ These civilian reports, combined with severe resource constraints, convinced Leclerc to forgo a Model 1 in favor of Model 3 entente.

No equivalent level of civilian participation was present in the brief window between Indochina and Algeria. When task pressure disappeared, so too did civilian attention. Civilian leaders were content to leave doctrinal decisions and the interpretation of recent experience to military professionals. Consequently, military beliefs and preferences dominated the interwar period with predictable results; the military

⁸⁷¹ For a more detailed discussion of the resettlement crisis, see Chapter 5, pp. 380-384.

⁸⁷² Général Leclerc, "Memorandum du Général Leclerc pour le Colonel de Guillebon, Kandy, le 7 septembre 1945," in Bodinier, pp. 163.

⁸⁷³ Général Leclerc, "Rapport du Général Leclerc à l'amiral d'Argenlieu," in Bodinier, *Le Retour de la France en Indochine*, pp. 149-152.

⁸⁷⁴ Jean Cédile, "Rapport de Cédile au Général Leclerc, Saigon, le 17 septembre 1945," in Bodinier, pp. 175-178, 180; Jean Saintenay, *Histoire d'une Paix Manquée, Indochine 1945-1947* (Paris: Fayard, 1967), pp. 65, 90; Andre Martel, *Leclerc: Le soldat et le politique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), pp. 358-362.

immediately turned from colonial war and counterinsurgency to conventional war and technological modernization. Civilian influence depends on a high level of civilian attention or interest; neither was present once wartime pressures had abated.

In the early phases of Algeria, an alert and assertive metropolitan government challenged the military's Model 1 reflex. Mendès-France and Mitterand sought to avert a replay of the indiscriminate repression that had followed Sétif. When their explicit injunctions on collective responsibility were ignored by Cherrière and his subordinates, they installed Soustelle to arrest the slide from "limited repression" to Model 1. Soustelle's formal restrictions on the use of military force forced Cherrière and his subordinates to articulate the reasoning behind their calls for normative and material escalation. While Soustelle's initiatives were neither popular nor uncontested, the clash of Model 3 reasoning and Model 1 military strategy forced military logic into the open.

In Indochina and Algeria, civilian elites viewed the evolution of insurgency and counterinsurgent strategy through a fundamentally different lens. Civilian assumptions and causal beliefs helped them identify underlying strategic flaws long before military elites were willing to acknowledge them.

In Indochina, civilian advice highlighted the gap between civilian and military theories of political influence. General Sabattier, writing in May 1945, expressed the canonical military view that the collapse of French authority and its remedy were intrinsically military problems:

It is quite evident that the Indochina problem is presently, above all, a military problem. Indochina must be retaken by force of arms. The greater the part France plays in the effort necessary to drive the Japanese out of Indochina, the stronger her rights, vis-à-vis the Indochinese and the Allies, to sovereignty in the territory.

Sabattier's answer was to reject political compromise and machination in favor of decisive military action:

It would be easy to reestablish order by force, provided sufficient means are applied.... Being reluctant to employ force we have thought first of political action, but we have gone from deception to deception; each time the chiefs we have addressed have turned out to be no more than phantoms whose silhouettes have faded more and more until they have completely disappeared into the mists. Happy will be he who manages to comb through the tangled mess of interests, base and dishonorable acts, the motives and influences that animate the revolutionary propagandists of the second military territory [Indochina].⁸⁷⁵

Though civilian advisers shared the military's interest in restoring French sovereignty, their diagnosis, prescriptions and proscriptions were fundamentally different. Where the military was fixated on the balance of forces and logistical constraints, civilians were more concerned with political intangibles that the military discounted: the intrinsic preferences of the local population and their relation to French authority. These observers understood that Vietnamese popular enthusiasm for self-rule, combined with frustration with the famines and floods of the preceding two years, would render a simple military restoration of control ineffective. The advisers were unanimous in their desire to avoid the decisive showdown that the French military anticipated and even welcomed. Instead, their intermediate objective was to secure entente⁸⁷⁶ – a negotiated deal which preserved core French interests without provoking nationalist sentiment. They feared what direct military confrontation might bring. In the case of decisive victory, the French might be left with no visible partners to administer the territory and no way to dissipate the nationalist passions aroused by the abortive revolution of 1945. In the case of incomplete victory, the French might be left with a “holy war” that pitted the Viet Minh and large portions of the local populations against a

⁸⁷⁵ Général Sabattier, “Note pour le gouvernement du Général Sabattier, commandant les troupes françaises en Chine,” in Bodinier, pp. 143, 146.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid., Sainteny, pp. 65; *ibid.*, Cédile, in Bodinier, pp. 176-177.

thinly stretched French Expeditionary Corps. Civilian advice in the opening months of the Indochina conflict had strong Hippocratic overtones; the essential task was to avoid acts that would render impossible the restoration of French indirect rule.

These civilian skeptics also clearly understood that France was only one of several active competitors for authority in Indochina. Far from being a simple military struggle between the Viet Minh and the Expeditionary Corps, the competition involved Chinese Nationalist forces, the Viet Minh, and the population. All these parties were actors in a violent political drama, and the key, in the minds of most civilian advisers, was the skillful manipulation of these actors to maximize French gains. On the advice of his civilian advisers, Leclerc used the threat of Chinese occupation as a tool to compel Viet Minh political concessions. What Sabattier and most of his military colleagues dismissed as a distraction, Leclerc and his civilian advisers saw as the core of a political contest whose outward military trappings were deceptive.

In Algeria, these same assumptions and causal beliefs led civilians to resist Models 1 and 2 and advocate Model 3. In the earliest stages of the rebellion, the metropolitan government was overwhelmingly concerned with avoiding overkill and popular alienation.⁸⁷⁷ Mitterand and Soustelle highlighted the risk that Model 1 strategies might be counterproductive. These same leaders were more open to the idea that longstanding popular grievances fueled the insurgency. Civilian calls for economic development and political reform sprang from an implicit understanding of the full spectrum of resistance. Much earlier than most of their military colleagues, civilians recognized that even the most effective attrition strategy might fail to interrupt or reverse the flow of locals from non-violent sympathy to armed resistance.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid., Miquel, pp. 155.

The late war resettlement crisis brought the clash of assumptions and beliefs into the open yet again. Military leaders embraced resettlement as a way to improve military pursuit and establish Model 2 political control. Civilian elites and S.A.S. leaders resisted the expansion of the program on the grounds that it would pauperize and alienate the Muslim population. While Challe and other military commanders acknowledged the costs of the resettlement program, they refused to curtail it on the grounds that pursuit and population control was the only path to the restoration of authority. Civilian distinctions between coercive control and consensual authority lay behind de Gaulle's subsequent break with Model 2 strategy and his embrace of self-determination as the foundation of French policy.

The history of both conflicts highlights the gap between civilian insight and influence. In Indochina, a series of skeptical metropolitan governments repeatedly sought to prod the local command into a search for alternatives to Model 1. The dispatch of senior military officers to perform informal audits proved largely ineffective in changing the behavior of the local command; the command tended to ignore advice that was at odds with their own judgment, and the chronic instability and weakness of the metropolitan governments meant that they could do this with impunity. Émile Bollaert's ill fated attempt to pursue accommodation with the Viet Minh in 1947 was yet another example of civilian attempts to break with Model 1 prescriptions of the local command; this initiative collapsed under pressure from a military command that was sure that military victory was within its grasp.

In Algeria, senior civilians frequently questioned military strategy and performance. As in Indochina, however, their efforts to influence decision making were

blocked on multiple fronts. The growing power and confidence of the military in civil administration made it increasingly difficult for the metropolitan government to influence events on the ground. After the Battle of Algiers in 1957, the military's success was used to justify their assumption of sweeping police and administrative powers. The *pied noirs*' fierce determination to avoid political compromise reinforced the military's attachment to Model 1 and later Model 2. Together, the combination of rising military power and *pied noir* intransigence represented a very significant brake on the power of the central government. In spite of considerable misgivings about the logic of Model 2 strategy, civilian elites were unable to influence the conduct of the campaign in Algeria from 1957 through the coming of de Gaulle in late 1958.

The coming of de Gaulle gave new weight to the Model 3 critique. His initial gestures, the Constantine Plan and the *paix des braves*, were fundamental departures from the prevailing Model 2 strategy of population control. Though he later endorsed a return to Model 2 military action under Challe in 1959, de Gaulle's swift return to Model 3 policy reflected an understanding that any lasting solution would have to be minimally acceptable to the local population.

De Gaulle's combination of military stature and political insight enabled him to impose Model 3 priorities over the objections of a skeptical military. This underscores a central point. Strategic insight, whatever its source, cannot be consequential without the power to impose it. Civilians and a minority within the military frequently challenged military strategy and that organization's self-evaluation. While civilians were more likely to question military estimates of progress, they were far less likely to exert

sufficient influence. Only when civilians participated in the development and evaluation of counterinsurgent strategy were they able to impose and maintain Model 3 solutions.

Part III

Testing External Validity

Part III:

A French Disease? Tests of External Validity

As the Chapter Six demonstrates, the theory developed in this volume explains the dysfunctional patterns of intrawar and interwar learning in the three French cases. What remains untested is the explanatory range of the theory. A reasonable skeptic might ask whether the learning patterns observed in the French cases are particular to the French experience rather than generalizable to the broader set of counterinsurgency campaigns.

As noted in the introduction to Part 2 of this study, the only solution to the problem of sample bias is to expand the number of cases examined. The most robust test is true, “out of sample” prediction or retrodiction. If the theory can explain patterns of organizational learning beyond the original cases from which the theory was developed, then the theory is strengthened. If the theory fails to explain patterns observed in the additional cases, or if the patterns are at odds with the core predictions of the model, then the theory is weakened or its explanatory range circumscribed.

In order to answer the charge of sample bias, we identify three additional shadow cases. In each shadow case, we ask four questions. First, are the posited dominant patterns of intrawar and interwar behavior present? Second, do the military operational code and bureaucratic preferences explain these patterns? Third, do changes in the independent variables – task pressure, civilian participation and resources – explain deviation from the dominant pattern? Fourth, do the causal mechanisms identified in Chapter 2 connect changes in the independent variables and dependent variables?

Each shadow case has been selected to address important challenges to the external validity of the insights drawn from the three French cases. The first two shadow cases, those of Palestine and Malaya, are drawn from the British tradition. These British experiences are significant in theoretical and historical terms. The British cases enable us to isolate the effects of national and organizational culture while holding constant a host of other factors: task pressure (expeditionary counterinsurgency), mixed conventional and colonial military experience, great power, etc. In historical terms, they address the theory of British exceptionalism: the notion that the British army is better than other armies at developing solutions to counterinsurgency and retaining them over time. If the British are indeed different, then we should see those differences in intrawar adaptation and interwar retention. If on the other hand, British behavior closely resembles that of the French, then the military operational code and bureaucratic interests may be the most effective explanation.

The third shadow case is the Thai counterinsurgency campaign against the Communists (1965-1983): a domestic counterinsurgency campaign waged by a small, Asian power. Both the French and British cases involved efforts by European great powers to suppress resistance in their colonial possessions; both France and the United Kingdom faced choices between investments in European and colonial defense. Neither of these issues was present in the Thai case. The Thai government was engaged in a domestic counterinsurgency campaign; the survival of the state was at stake and the Thais had every incentive to improve their strategy as quickly as possible. In addition, the Thai state and military were intimately familiar with the cultural and historical setting in which the struggle was waged.

Summary of the Shadow Cases

The case of British Palestine provides at least three major insights into the role of the military operational code and the independent variables: the illusion of familiarity, the escalatory response, and the retrospective misinterpretation of experience. Faced with a surge in violence, the British military assumed that the problem was essentially military; attack on the armed perpetrators was the key and the population would be chastened by the demonstration of force. When Model 1 failed to halt the violence, the military's first recourse was escalation – material and normative. Even when massive escalation in manpower and the imposition of martial law failed to reverse or even slow the growth in violence, most British military observers ascribed the failure to civilian restraint and resource shortfalls. The image that emerges from this case is not one of a genuinely different and more enlightened approach to counterinsurgency; instead it appears a faithful expression of the military operational code, nearly indistinguishable from the early French responses in Indochina and Algeria.

Malaya offers still more evidence of professional dysfunction: inappropriate response, learning traps, and the belated adoption of Model 2. In spite of the recent failure of Model 1 in Palestine, the immediate reaction to the new insurgency was to apply the same solution. As in Palestine, the learning trap delayed recognition of the bankruptcy of Model 1 strategy. If every tactical encounter ended in victory, and the insurgents remained intact, then the logical answer was escalation. Two years of stalemate led to a Model 2 epiphany under Briggs. With his arrival, the military shifted its focus from the insurgents to their support base and applied a resettlement formula

similar to the one that adopted by the French in Cambodia and later in Algeria. Eighteen months after the introduction of the Model 2 Briggs Plan, the conflict had reached a new stalemate. While resettlement and food control had increased the pressure on the guerillas, the end of the insurrection was nowhere in sight; all political factions were unsatisfied with the status quo and the level of violence and insurgent strength remained very high.

A series of political and economic shocks in late 1951 precipitated the final major strategy change, the change to Model 3. The inspection tour by Oliver Lyttelton of the Colonial Office in November 1951 laid the foundations of a new Malaya policy and paved the way for the appointment of a new civil-military commander, General Templer. Both were committed to a markedly different, political formula that offered concessions to the two major ethnic groups: accelerated independence for the Malays and citizenship and land tenure for the Chinese. Templer and Lyttelton also pursued a conditional relaxation of the restrictions placed on the Chinese community.

The “lessons” of Malaya, as interpreted by the British and other militaries, offer still more evidence of the military operational code and bureaucratic interest. The British faced two major insurgencies after Templer’s turning point in Malaya. In both Cyprus and Kenya, leaders applied Model 1 formulas proven bankrupt in the campaigns of Palestine and Malaya. In both cases, the overwhelming tendency was to focus on the tactical lessons rather than the strategies and circumstances that had contributed to success in Malaya. The ultimate expression of this “tacticization of strategy”⁸⁷⁸ was the ATOM Manual, a collection of tactical, military routines largely divorced from strategic problems of counterinsurgency. Even over the longer run, the standard historical

⁸⁷⁸ Michael Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2005), pp. 355.

narrative of the Emergency centered on Briggs' Model 2 plan and downplayed the role of the civilian intervention and the political solutions fashioned by Lyttelton and the Colonial Officer. By transforming Model 3 success into a Model 2 narrative, the British military extracted lessons consistent with the military operational code and conveniently free of the Model 3 political logic. They learned what they wanted to learn and airbrushed out the inconvenient civil and political prerequisites to victory.

The Thai case shows that the military operational code is not a strictly Western disease. The campaign opened with a Model 2 strategy championed by American civilian agencies and the Thai police. As the resources provided to the Thai military increased dramatically in 1966 and 1967, this Model 2 approach was abandoned in favor of a military run, Model 1 suppression campaign. Though this approach stimulated increased resistance and did nothing to reduce the scale of the insurgent base, it remained the core of Thai counterinsurgency doctrine from 1967 through the early 1970s. American withdrawal from Vietnam and the reduction in American military aid precipitated a change in Thai strategy and the search for an alternative counterinsurgency strategy. Only after the complete withdrawal of American forces from Thailand, the surge in Communist strength in 1976, and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1979, did the final change in strategy occur. In General Prem, the Prime Minister and leading counterinsurgency reformer announced a politically led Model 3 strategy based on generous amnesty and local concessions. An insurgency that had reached its peak strength in 1979 had virtually collapsed by 1983 under the weight of massive defections.

As in the Malayan case, Model 3 success did not lead to Model 3 retention. When Thailand faced a new outbreak of separatist violence in the ethnically Malaya regions of

the deep south in 2004, it applied a Model 1 strategy.⁸⁷⁹ While the architects of the Model 3 victory of the early 1980s are still present and influential in the Thai political sphere, the state and military applied first Model 1 and then Model 2 formulas in the South.

The three shadow cases strongly suggest that learning dysfunction in counterinsurgency is a professional rather than national or civilizational disease. French, British and Thai officers adopt the same dysfunctional solutions when they confront insurgency: 1) the illusion of familiarity, 2) Model 1 response, 3) learning traps and 4) the belated embrace of Model 2 alternatives. When these militaries adopted Model 3 strategies, it was typically the result of either civilian participation, resource scarcity or the exhaustion of alternatives. All three countries engaged in selective, interwar retention of counterinsurgency “lessons.” While all three militaries appeared eager to retain tactical routines, they were less eager to retain Model 2 let alone Model 3 strategies.

⁸⁷⁹ Ukrist Pathmanand, “Thaksin’s Achilles Heel: The Failure of Hawkish Approaches in the Thai South” in Duncan McCargo (ed.), *Rethinking Thailand’s Southern Violence* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2007), pp. 71-73.

Chapter 7

The British Exception? Palestine and Malaya

Palestine: From Failed Consolidation to Small War

The British campaign in Palestine (1945-1947) is a classic illustration of the clash of civilian and military logic in counterinsurgency. With memories of the Arab Revolt (1936-1939) fresh in mind, the British advocated a Model 1 response to rising Jewish terrorism in Palestine. Convinced that victory in the Arab Revolt had been the result of swift and ruthless action against the guerillas and their supporters, military leaders believed that an attack on the armed forces of its opponents would stamp out resistance and intimidate the Jewish population into submission. The British civil authorities resisted such moves arguing that demonstrations of force and collective punishment would alienate the population and fatally compromise British authority in the territory.

While civilians controlled policy from 1939 to February 1946, rising manpower and insurgent violence eventually tilted the bureaucratic balance in favor of the military's Model 1 formula. Although the military succeeded in imposing its preferred solution, the results were dismal. In spite of overwhelming levels of force, the imposition of martial law, and large scale offensive operations, the military was unable to stamp out terrorist violence and the British decided to withdraw from the territory in the late summer of 1947. Even in defeat, British military leaders clung to the Model 1 critique. In spite of the enormous military manpower applied, they continued to attribute their failure to suppress Jewish resistance to a lack of manpower and excessive civilian restraint.

Prelude: Split Interpretations of the Arab Revolt (1936-1939)

After the First World War, Britain assumed responsibility for the League of Nations Mandate in Palestine. The central political issue of the interwar period was Jewish immigration and its effects on the political and economic division of spoils in Palestine. The British faced two rebellions in the final decade of the Mandate. The Arab Revolt (1936-1939) pitted the local Arab population against the British authorities over issues of Jewish immigration and Arab rights. The Jewish Rebellion (1945-1947) over Jewish immigration and the struggle for Jewish political independence.

The British responded to the Arab Revolt with Model 1 strategy. British military leaders saw the government's "extreme moderation" as the cause of the revolt, and the answer to resistance in the unimpeded exertion of military force against the perpetrators. A tenfold expansion in the British garrison,⁸⁸⁰ the ruthless application of force, and the mobilization of large numbers of Jewish combatants,⁸⁸¹ forced the rebels to break into smaller groups but did not break the rebellion.⁸⁸² In a postwar summary of the campaign, the Palestine General Staff argued that martial law was essential to uproot resistance:

The essence of martial law is the power it gives to go to the root of the trouble – to strike at those who instigate but will not come into the open...and to deal severely with those who use the patriotism of others as a cloak under which to further their own ends.⁸⁸³

⁸⁸⁰ Between 1936 and 1937, the number of British battalions in Palestine rose from 2 to 22 (Source: H.J. Simson, *British Rule, and Rebellion* (London: William Blackwood & Sons Ltd., 1938), pp. 263).

⁸⁸¹ This mobilization took two forms. The British raised between 12,000 and 19,000 Jewish police auxiliaries to protect the Jewish settlements and relieve British troops of defensive functions. In addition, the British permitted the development of the Haganah and other Jewish armed groups. In some cases this crossed the line from toleration to active training and sponsorship as in the case of Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads. (John Newsinger, *British Counter-insurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 4.

⁸⁸² Charles Townshend, "The Defence of Palestine: Insurrection and Public Security, 1936-1939," *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 409 (October 1988), pp. 939.

⁸⁸³ *Military Lessons of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine 1936*, PRO, WO 19170, pp. 32 as cited in Townshend, "The Defence of Palestine: Insurrection and Public Security, 1936-1939," pp. 930.

Even with unrestricted offensive operations, abundant troops, extensive use of aerial bombing against military and civil targets, the Arab rebellion did not end until Britain published its 1939 White Paper that addressed the primary Arab complaints over increased Jewish immigration. As a result, the British remained divided over the causes of victory with the military seeing a validation of Model 1 and the civilians a demonstration of the power of limited political concession.⁸⁸⁴

Failed Consolidation (1939-1945)

Between the end of the Arab revolt in 1939 and the beginning of the Jewish insurrection in 1944 and 1945, the British government sought to consolidate its authority through a Model 3 formula of negotiation and selective use of force. The outbreak of the Second World War imposed strict limits on resources available in Palestine. While the British were eager to demobilize the Jewish armed groups they had sponsored during the Arab revolt, they were unable to take aggressive action for fear of destabilizing their regime or draining resources from the war effort. While they used military troops to assist in police searches for illegal weapons, violent clashes provoked by such searches in 1939 and again in 1943 led the British to pull back.⁸⁸⁵

The murder of Lord Moyne, the British Minister Resident of the Middle East, by Jewish terrorists of the Lehi group in Cairo in November 1944 set off a debate between advocates of Model 1 and Model 3. Local civil servants and military leaders favored a very sharp crackdown on the Jewish population, including major search operations and

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., Townshend, pp. 945-946.

⁸⁸⁵ Bruce Hoffman, *The Failure of British Military Strategy in Palestine 1939-1947* (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1983), pp.11-12.

shows of force.⁸⁸⁶ The War Cabinet in London took the opposite position, arguing that demonstrations of force and large scale army operations were counterproductive:

Searches were rarely productive; secrecy as to the action contemplated was difficult to maintain; mistakes were made by the troops; and bad feeling engendered. The slower, less spectacular, but only sure method of dealing with the problem was the building up of the Police....the situation was not necessarily best dealt with by increasing the military forces in the country and that, apart from the great practical difficulties of finding troops, the problem was essentially one for armed Police.⁸⁸⁷

Though the War Cabinet won the argument in 1944, the basic tension between Model 1 and Model 3 remained unresolved. Proponents of restraint pointed to the Jewish Agency's decision to cooperate in the suppression of the Irgun; from November 1944 on, they passed close to 1,000 names of Irgun terrorists to the British authorities, an act that resulted in the arrest of 300 suspects and dealt a sharp blow to the terrorist group.⁸⁸⁸ Model 1 advocates remained leery of a solution that relied on the cooperation of the Jewish Agency and its armed wing, the Haganah.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid., Hoffman, pp. 15.

⁸⁸⁷ "War Cabinet Minutes, 1944: W.M. (44) 155th Conclusions. Confidential Annex (24th November, 1944 – 11:00 A.M.)" in Bruce Hoffman, *The Failure of British Military Strategy in Palestine*, pp. 70, 72.

⁸⁸⁸ J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror out of Zion: The Fight for Israeli Independence* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1996), pp. 127-133; John Newsinger, *British Counter-insurgency from Palestine to Northern Ireland* (London: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 9-10.

Palestine (1945-1947)	Phase 1: Restraint and Policing (9/45-6/46)	Phase 2: Decapitation and Aggressive Search (6/46-2/47)	Phase 3: Martial Law and Collapse (3/47-9/47)
Military Commanders	LTG J.C. D'Arcy	LTG Evelyn Barker	LTG H.A. MacMillan FM Montgomery
COIN Strategy	Model 3	Model 1	Model 1
Success/Failure	Trend Failure	Episodic Success <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operation Agatha • Operation Shark Trend Failure	Episodic Failure (Martial Law) Trend Failure
Resources (Manpower)	Medium	High	High
Resources (Equipment)	Medium	Medium	High
Civilian Participation	High	Medium	Low

Phase 1: Restraint and Policing (September 1945-May 1946)

With the end of the Second World War, Britain once more possessed the resources and attention to confront the rising tide of terrorism directly. The nascent Jewish revolt proved far more complex than the Arab Revolt. The British Labor government's decision to abandon its pro-Jewish policy on immigration led to the collapse of cooperation between the Jewish Agency and the British authorities. The Jewish Agency, which had helped the British suppress the Irgun in 1944 and 1945, now joined its onetime enemy in a United Resistance Movement designed to force a return to pro-Jewish policy.⁸⁸⁹ The two smaller and more radical factions, the Irgun and Lehi,⁸⁹⁰ carried out the majority of the attacks on British security forces; the Jewish Agency and

⁸⁸⁹ David Charters, *The British Army and the Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-1947* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 53.

⁸⁹⁰ David Charters estimates that there were 1,500 members of the Irgun in 1945; the Lehi numbered 250-300 in 1944 (Source: David Charters, *The British Army and the Jewish Insurgency in Palestine*, pp. 46, 48).

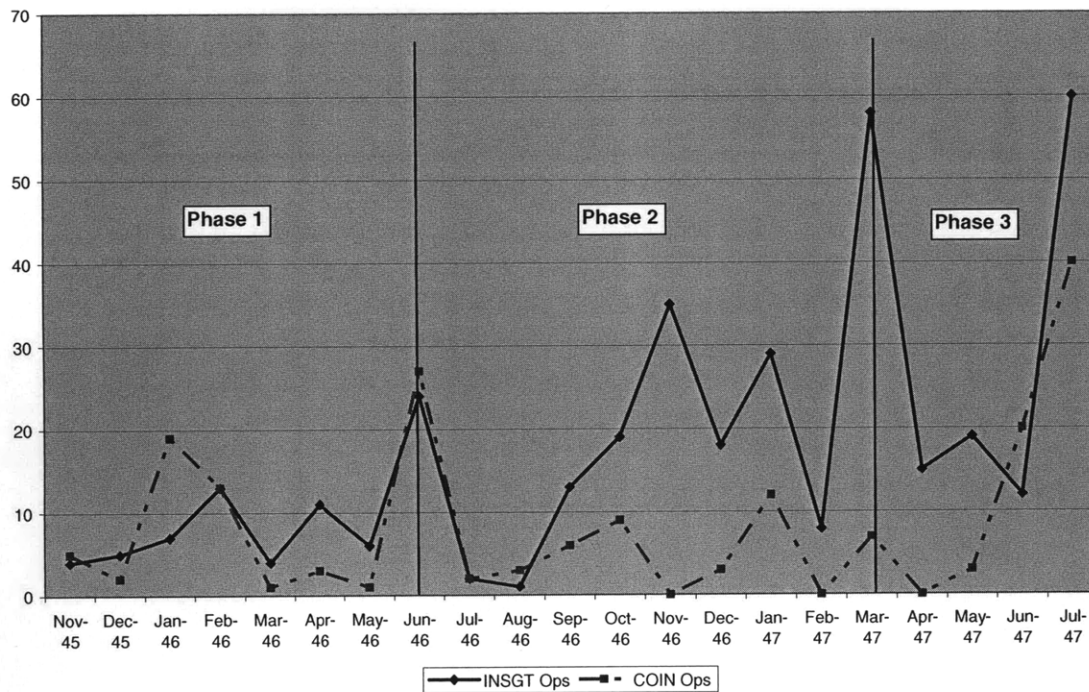
the Haganah⁸⁹¹ avoided direct military confrontation, focusing their efforts on subverting immigration controls.

The British garrison consisted of some 100,000 military troops supporting a Palestine Police force of 20,000.⁸⁹² Though the High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir Alan Cunningham, restricted the use of the army garrison to static defense, selective search operations and support of the Palestine Police, this did not sit well with many military commanders. As the level of forces available and the level of violence rose, military commanders argued that the answer lay in offensive action against all Jewish insurgent groups.

⁸⁹¹ The Haganah numbered between 43,000 and 45,000 in 1945, with some 8,000 in the Hish (Field Force) and 2,000-3,000 in the elite Palmach (Source: *ibid.*, Charters, pp. 44).

⁸⁹² These rough estimates may overstate the British security forces available. First, only 25,000 combat troops were available at any one time for mobile operations, a situation that closely resembled that of the French garrison in Algeria in 1954. Second, some 12,800 of the 20,000 man Palestine Police force were members of the Jewish Settlement Police. This force had been developed to protect Jewish communities against Arab attacks during the 1930s and its composition reduced its utility in a clash between Jewish armed groups and the British authorities (Source: *ibid.*, Charters, pp. 88-90).

Insurgent Attacks and Counterinsurgent Operations (1945-1947)



Phase 2: Decapitation and Aggressive Search (June 1946- February 1947)

Unable to find or eradicate the Irgun/Lehi insurgents, the military argued in favor of a decapitation strike against the most visible elements of the Jewish resistance: the Haganah and Palmach. Rising levels of violence and the lack of cooperation by the Jewish Agency led the High Commissioner to sanction Operation Agatha in late June 1946. Over a four day period, some 17,000 British security forces arrested 2,718 persons including leading members of the Jewish Agency, Haganah and Palmach; related search operations uncovered 33 arms caches.⁸⁹³ In military eyes, the operation had been a success: it had produced positive operational results at very low cost, and it had landed a public blow against Jewish organizations suspected of assisting or tolerating the more radical insurgent organizations.

⁸⁹³ Ibid., Charters, pp. 118.

What it did not do was land a decisive blow against the Irgun or Lehi. Instead, less than a month later the Irgun launched the largest terrorist attack of the rebellion, killing 91 people in an attack on the British military headquarters in the King David Hotel. The King David bombing prompted the British to launch a second, large scale offensive operation in Tel Aviv. Operation Shark (30 July-2 August 1946) involved a room by room search of the town of Tel Aviv by 21,000 British troops. The British interrogated some 102,000 persons, arresting 787. As Bruce Hoffman has pointed out, the operations were judged a success because they produced tangible gains at very low cost (four Jews killed, zero Army casualties).⁸⁹⁴

Judged by Model 3 standards, however, both operations were failures. First, the operations were misdirected, landing primarily on the more moderate and cooperative Jewish Agency and Haganah rather than Irgun or Lehi. Second, Operations Agatha and Shark had further alienated a Jewish population that considered them assaults on the Jewish agency and the Jewish population. Third, the operations against the Haganah, far from convincing the Agency to crackdown on the Irgun, led them instead to withdraw from political negotiations. This boycott prevented the British from making any progress towards the restoration of order in the territory. Fourth, to the extent that the operations injured the Haganah, they made it easier for the rival Irgun faction to operate freely. Fifth, these large scale operations had failed to produce more than a temporary, local reduction in the level of insurgent activity; within a very short period of time, the terrorists managed to rebound and increase the level of violence substantially.⁸⁹⁵ While the limited effect and political costs of the operation were clear to Cunningham and

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., Hoffman, pp. 23.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid., Charters, pp. 99.

others from the start, a single-minded focus on tangible military results led the military to misjudge the result of their operations.

Phase 3: Martial Law and Collapse (March 1947-September 1947)

After a brief lull in terrorist activity, the violence began to increase again and the civil-military clash intensified. Field Marshal Montgomery, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and a veteran of the counterinsurgency campaigns in Ireland and Palestine, argued that the civil authorities under Cunningham had hamstrung the military command; the only way to rectify this was to take the offensive and impose collective responsibility in the form of fines and martial law.⁸⁹⁶ Cunningham rejected this logic arguing that collective responsibility would be actively counterproductive:

I should say with the examples of Ireland and even the Arab rebellion before me, I am dead against reprisals as such. The question of the morale of the troops is constantly in my mind and is a factor which I am constantly emphasizing to HM government, but I am sure that you will agree that it would not be right to take action which would imperil imminent political solution to this thorny problem, which alone can bring peace to this country, for the sake of the morale factor alone.⁸⁹⁷

This debate pitted Model 3 advocates led by Cunningham, General Barker [the senior commander in Palestine] and the Colonial Office against the Model 1 faction led by the War Office, Montgomery and General Dempsey [Commander in Chief, Middle East Land Forces]. Incidents in December 1946 increased the pressure on the government and enabled the Model 1 faction to carry the day. As David Charters points out, Montgomery saw material escalation and offensive operations as the obvious solution:

The Field-Marshal wanted to flood the countryside with mobile troops to restore confidence in authority and make things difficult for the insurgents....he [Montgomery] advocated 'turning the place upside down' to disrupt the population and to persuade them to cooperate with the authorities against the insurgents. Montgomery welcomed the opportunity to draw the Haganah out for a battle, claiming that he had succeeded with such measures against the Arabs before the war. Enthusiastically he offered the entire strength of the British army, bringing in reinforcements from

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., Charters, pp. 102.

⁸⁹⁷ Cunningham as quoted in Charters, pp. 102.

Egypt or Germany. Cunningham feared that this would destroy any hope of a political settlement and Creech-Jones [the Colonial Secretary] observed that war with the Haganah meant war with the whole Jewish nation. Montgomery replied that he thought the British government would have to enforce partition against the wishes of the Jews and the Arabs.⁸⁹⁸

Montgomery and Dempsey succeeded in forcing the imposition of martial law in March 1947. Though the edicts covered only Tel Aviv and the Jewish sections of Jerusalem, they were an expression of a more general and unmistakably Model 1 theory of victory. Army planners hoped to apprehend or disrupt the terrorist bands and intimidate the population into submission. As one planning document made clear, the deprivation of liberty and the disruption of commerce would compel submission and help the British crush resistance: “Such measures by striking at the liberty and pockets of the private citizens may induce them to cooperate by laying information against and refusing to shelter the terrorists.”⁸⁹⁹

Though the Model 1 advocates had succeeded in imposing martial law, the results of this new escalation in force brought similar results. The British failed to capture more than 60 terrorists in the first month of operations, and the restrictions on the population had the opposite of their intended effect. Instead of delivering information to the security forces, the Jewish population protested their collective punishment and refused to furnish support. After the initial shock, the crackdown did very little to suppress resistance:

The Sixth Airborne’s intelligence officer noted how, “In spite of all the restrictions, acts of sabotage and murder continue on an increasing scale...The Illegal Forces are going all out to thumb their noses at the authorities and their fellow countrymen.”⁹⁰⁰

The paltry results of martial law led the Army and Cunningham to suspend it on March 17, 1947. Having taken the Model 1 path with Operations Agatha, Shark and martial law, however, it was essentially impossible to return to a Model 3 formula based

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., Charters, pp. 105.

⁸⁹⁹ Joint Planning Staff document cited in *ibid.*, Hoffman, pp. 29.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., Hoffman, pp. 30.

on the cooperation with the Jewish Agency and the population. In the face of rising violence by the Irgun and ethnic violence between Jews and Arabs, Cunningham now argued that there could be no turning back: with negotiation forfeited, martial law and reinforcement were the only options remaining. At this point, the military, chastened by the reverses of March, argued that even with one British soldier for every six Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, they could not impose martial law in Tel Aviv let alone in the country as a whole. Faced with the Army's new insistence on massive reinforcement, the Cabinet in London balked and by August had resigned itself to abandoning the Mandate.

The scale of the British garrison relative to the local population provides a natural experiment in the limits of material escalation. The ratio of all British security forces (police and military) at the peak was 61.77 for every 1,000 inhabitants or nearly three times the level James Quinlivan identifies as the threshold for effective stabilization operations (20 security forces for every 1,000 inhabitants).⁹⁰¹ Even when the police are subtracted to account for the large number of Jewish Settlement Police, the ratio remains 51.47. When the ratio is calculated using the Jewish population alone (i.e. excluding the Arab inhabitants who were uninvolved in the uprising), the result is even more striking; the ratio of British security forces rises to 197/1,000 Jewish inhabitants, nearly ten times the Quinlivan threshold. These ratios lend virtually no credence to the Model 1 explanation for defeat. Instead, they make the military's postwar explanation of defeat all the more revealing. The military's insistence on the significance of resource scarcity and civil restraint displays in the baldest terms the ability of the military operational code to distort perception – even in retrospect.

⁹⁰¹ James T. Quinlivan, "Force Requirements in Stability Operations," *Parameters*, Winter 1995.

Palestine and the Theory

The collision of civil and military opinion in Palestine demonstrates the power of professional beliefs in shaping strategic choice. The military was deeply suspicious of the Model 3 formula applied by civil authorities from the end of the Arab Revolt to May 1946. While reliance on the Jewish Agency and the Haganah to suppress Jewish terror groups might have been acceptable under the extreme circumstances of the Second World War, the availability of abundant military manpower made a muscular Model 1 response feasible. Rising manpower proved a powerful solvent, capable of dissolving the tenuous civil-military accord to employ a mix of force and negotiation.

The strong military preference for a direct military solution to resistance rested on simplistic assumptions about the nature of the threat and the role of the population. The small scale of the Jewish armed groups made them appear vulnerable, and it was assumed that attack on the guerillas would cow the inhabitants into submission. These assumptions were functionally indistinguishable from those espoused by d'Argenlieu, Valluy and Cherrière in the opening phases of the Indochina and Algerian wars.

Operations Agatha and Shark stand as examples of the Model 1 learning trap. Each delivered short term, tangible results (the suppression of violence, the apprehension of suspects) at minimal cost. When each operation was followed by an upsurge in attacks, the ready answer was escalation in manpower and ruthlessness. Once the path of Model 1 military confrontation had been chosen, a return to Model 3 formula was virtually impossible.

The post hoc interpretation of the outcome is equally revealing. As the theory predicts, military leaders traced the failure to excessive civilian restraint and insufficient

resources. The stubborn Model 1 critique is particularly striking in view of the scale of resources committed to the suppression of the revolt. With one British soldier for every five Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, military leaders argued that they lacked the manpower to impose effective martial law in the major urban areas. As Field Marshal Montgomery's comments on Malaya would make clear, two years of ineffective escalation in Palestine did little to diminish the military's preference for Model 1 solutions to insurgency.

The Malayan Emergency (1948-1960)

In the Malayan case we seek to answer four questions. First, are the dominant intrawar and interwar patterns predicted in Chapter 2 present? Second, to what extent are these patterns traceable to the military operational code, bureaucratic interests, and the associated causal mechanisms? Third, to what extent do changes in the independent variables account for deviation from those dominant patterns? Specifically, did changes in civilian participation, resource levels, and task performance account for the adoption of Model 3 strategies? Fourth, do the specified causal mechanisms explain the connections between changes in the independent and dependent variables?

The Malayan case offers strong evidence of the military operational code at work. Just one month after the withdrawal from Palestine, British authorities responded to the outbreak of resistance in Malaya with a Model 1 strategy nearly indistinguishable from the one that had failed spectacularly in the last episode. While civilian leaders retained greater control over policy and strategy than their French counterparts, the British military approached the problem of counterinsurgency in much the same way the French

had in the early phases of Indochina and Algeria. After two years of largely ineffective Model 1 strategy, reinforcement and escalation, the British introduced a new Model 2 strategy in May 1950 - the Briggs Plan. The two principal elements of the plan were a unification of civil-military administration under the War Executive Committee System and the large scale resettlement of the Chinese population.⁹⁰² The unexpected, Korean War boom in tin and rubber prices provided a surge in Malayan government revenues; this windfall offset both the direct cost of resettlement and softened the political resentment engendered among the Chinese population.⁹⁰³

After a year and a half of Briggs' Model 2 strategy, the struggle appeared to have reached a new and costly stalemate. With the resettlement of over 500,000 Chinese squatters largely complete, the MCP insurgency remained largely intact: levels of violence were high, and the Chinese population appeared unwilling or unable to cooperate with the British authorities. Then in short order, the authorities suffered three shocks: the first two political, the third fiscal. The death of the High Commissioner Gurney in an ambush and the ascent of a Conservative government in London three weeks later opened the way for a wholesale change in local leadership and government policy. The new Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, developed a new Model 3 policy predicated on engagement with the Chinese population and rapid movement towards independence. General Templer, the civil and military governor selected by Churchill and Lyttelton, was sent to execute this new policy, restore order and engineer a post-colonial united Malaya. This choice of strategy was strongly influenced by a rapid contraction in British and Malayan state resources. The end of the tin and rubber boom

⁹⁰² Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004), pp. 101.

⁹⁰³ Ibid., Stubbs, pp. 109.

in 1952 had led to a contraction in the economy and Malayan government revenues; the British government was undergoing the most severe balance of payments crisis since 1947.⁹⁰⁴ Resource scarcity and the prospect of further belt tightening influenced the London government's decision to embrace a Model 3 strategy.

This shift from Model 2 to Model 3 strategy brought decisive results. Templer's announcement of a policy of ethnic compromise set the stage for the emergence of a Malay-Chinese coalition. While Templer continued to increase pressure on the MCP, his new strategy included major political and social concessions towards the Chinese population. These changes directly contributed to the shift in British fortunes and the stability of the emerging Malayan state.

Prelude: Incomplete Restoration and Failed Compromise (August 1945-May 1948)

British authority in colonial Malaya collapsed under the Japanese onslaught of 1941-1942. From the fall of Singapore in February 1942 through the Japanese surrender in August 1945, Britain's only significant role in Malaya was as the sponsor of a largely Chinese insurgency against the Japanese. While the British played a pivotal role in training, arming and advising the Chinese guerillas, these same resistance groups would constitute the backbone of the insurgent movement in 1948.⁹⁰⁵

In 1945, the British returned to a Malaya crippled by Japanese occupation and divided by a wave of ethnic violence and score settling that had followed the collapse of

⁹⁰⁴ Frank Heinlein, *British Government Policy and Decolonisation: Scrutinising the Official Mind* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 88-89.

⁹⁰⁵ The standard account of the British advisory role in occupied Malaya is F. Spencer Chapman's, *The Jungle is Neutral* (Times Books: Singapore, 1998).

the wartime protectorate.⁹⁰⁶ Though the British managed to demobilize a portion of the Communist guerilla army, the Malayan Peoples' Anti Japanese Army (M.P.A.J.A.), the Malaysian Communist Party (MCP) maintained a secret army and weapons as an option for future resistance.⁹⁰⁷

The British spent the period between 1945 and 1948 in an unsuccessful attempt to rebuild their imperial authority and address the fundamental problem of Malay politics: the division of power and status between native Malays and ethnic Chinese residents. According to the 1947 census, some 44% of the population of five million was Malay, 38.5% Chinese, 10.5% Indian, 5.5% aborigine, and 1.5% other groups including the estimated 20,000 Europeans (0.3% of the total population).⁹⁰⁸ Scattered violence perpetrated by Chinese "bandits" continued from the war's end through the outbreak of the Emergency. As Anthony Short has noted, the lack of government security and high ethnic tensions benefited the MCP – the only significant, extra-governmental armed group with a substantial political following.⁹⁰⁹ The first British model for a unified Malayan state, the so-called Malayan Union, collapsed when the Malay leaders of the federal states refused to sign treaties that centralized state control and gave equal rights

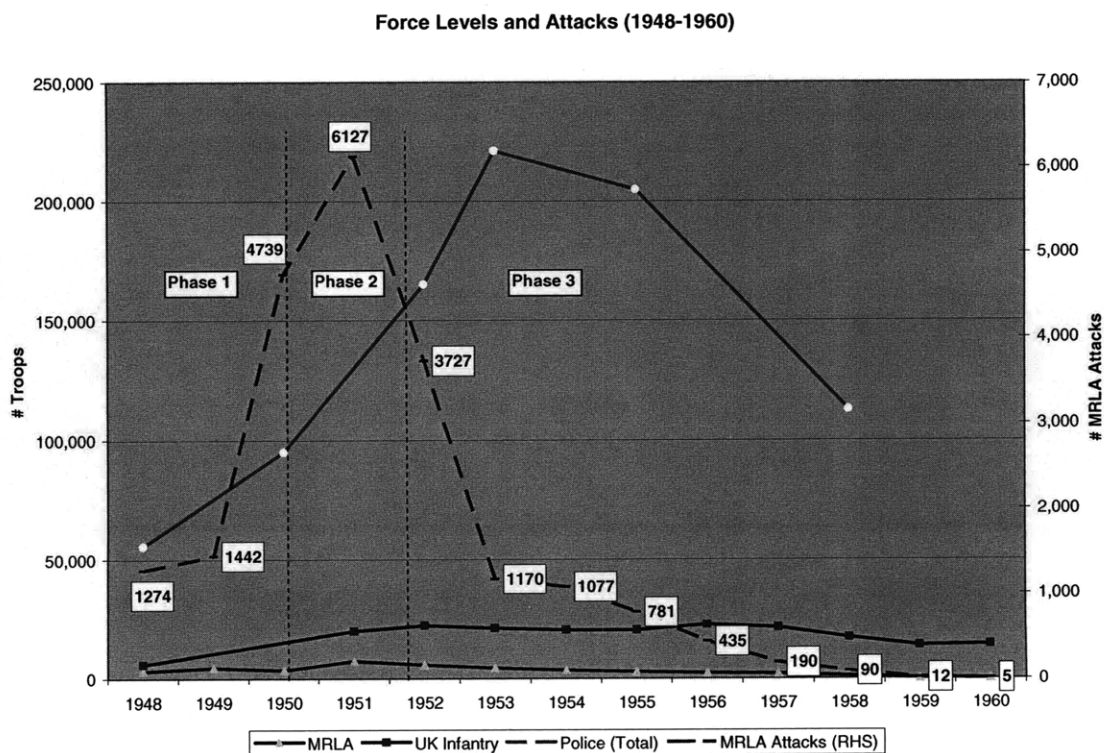
⁹⁰⁶ For a detailed account of ethnic violence during and after the Second World War, see Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance & Social Conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation, 1941-1946* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003)

⁹⁰⁷ Chin Peng, the leader of the MCP during the Malayan Emergency, argues that the M.P.A.J.A. had shifted its strategy as early as 1944 to compete with the British for territorial control in the event of Japanese surrender. These plans involved extensive wartime negotiations with the Japanese. Though the MCP ultimately chose legal struggle over armed resistance, their late war and early postwar behavior suggests that armed action against the British was closely considered throughout the period. Chin Peng estimates that somewhere between 500 and 1,000 guerillas of the secret army were retained in each state, for a likely total of 5,000 – 8,000 guerillas (Source: C.C.Chin, Karl Hack (eds.), *Dialogues with Chin Peng: New Light on the Malayan Communist Party* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2005), pp. 92-101; 105-106).

⁹⁰⁸ This summary of the 1947 census is drawn from Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerilla Warfare*, pp. 12.

⁹⁰⁹ Anthony Short, *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats: The Communist Insurrection in Malaya* (Singapore: Cultured Lotus, 2003), pp. 26-27.

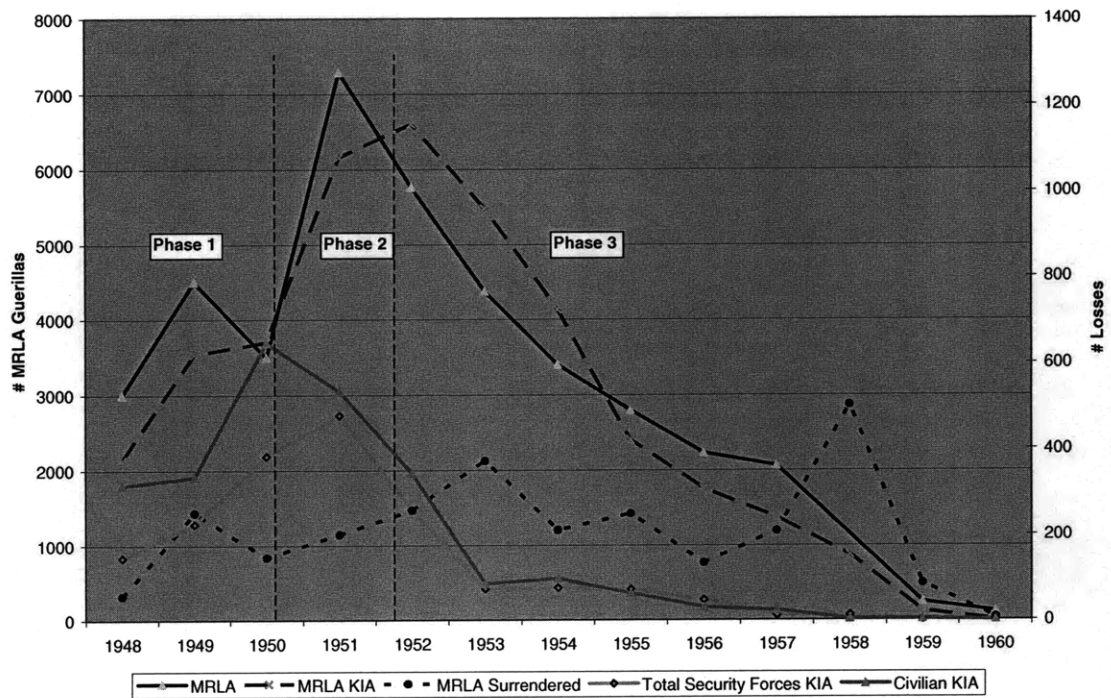
and citizenship to the Chinese.⁹¹⁰ The organized resistance to the idea of the Malayan Union led to the formation of the United Malaya Nationalist Organization (UMNO) which became the predominant political party in 1947 and remains so to this day.⁹¹¹ The Chinese were the losers in this outcome, and the MCP channeled this resentment into an increasingly militant labor movement.



⁹¹⁰ A.J. Stockwell, *Malaya: Part I The Malayan Union Experiment (1942-1948)*, British Documents on the End of Empire, Series B, Volume 3, pp. lxiii.

⁹¹¹ T.N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 84-87.

MRLA Strength and Relative Loss Rates



Malayan Emergency (1948-1960)	Phase 1: "Coercion and Enforcement" (6/48-5/50)	Phase 2: Briggs Plan (6/50-2/52)	Phase 3: State Consolidation (2/52-60)
Military Commanders	Wade (45-50) Boucher (48-50)	Briggs (Dir, Operations, 50-52) Urquhart (GOC, 50-52)	Templer (52-54) Stockwell (52-54) Bourne (54-56) Bower (56-57)
COIN Strategy	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Operational Innovations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ferret Force 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> War Executive Committees Resettlement Food Denial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amnesty/rewards Village charter Citizenship White Areas
Success/Failure	Trend failure	Stalemate	Success
Resources (Manpower)	Low	Medium	Medium
Resources (Equipment)	Low	Medium	Medium
Civilian Participation	Medium	Medium	High

Phase 1: “Coercion and Enforcement”⁹¹² (Model 1) (June 1948 - May 1950)

The decision by the MCP to take up armed struggle provoked a Model 1 response. The British authorities responded to the launch of the MCP insurgency with a classic Model 1 response. In what Richard Stubbs has described as a “reflex action,”⁹¹³ the High Commissioner Edward Gent and his military and police subordinates agreed on a sweeping military and police crackdown aimed at the “bandits” responsible for violence against civilians and security forces. The government immediately announced Emergency regulations restricting a number of basic freedoms and offering much wider latitude for police and military action.

The military response in particular showed all the signs of Model 1 reasoning. Just as General Cherrière had dismissed the early FLN attacks in Algeria as a relatively modest, traditional uprising, General Boucher, the senior military leader in Malaya saw the MCP uprising as an outbreak of banditry that could be resolved by prompt, offensive military action. Gauging the seriousness of the insurrection by the scale of the violence and the military potential of the guerilla force, Boucher was optimistic about the chances of a speedy resolution to the crisis:

I can tell you this is by far the easiest problem I have ever tackled. In spite of the appalling country and the ease with which he can hide, the enemy is far weaker in technique and courage than either the Greek or Indian Reds.⁹¹⁴

Boucher and his military colleagues insisted that the appropriate response was offensive rather than defensive. With roughly 6,000 infantrymen and 9,000 police available, the military argued that there were insufficient forces to defend the rubber plantation, tin mines, or local populations. Given the choice between defensive

⁹¹² This is Richard Stubbs’ description of the initial British response to the insurrection (Source: Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerilla Warfare*, pp. 70).

⁹¹³ Ibid., Stubbs, pp. 92.

⁹¹⁴ General Boucher as cited in Stubbs, pp. 71.

dispersion and prompt offensive action, the military chose the latter.⁹¹⁵ When M.J. MacDonald, the British High Commissioner for Southeast Asia, highlighted the importance of defending Britain's economic interests, the local government and military grudgingly acceded to the creation of a special constabulary, police force. This civilian intervention resulted in what would later be seen as the pivotal innovation of the early counterinsurgency campaign – the fielding of some 30,000 Malay special constables to assume the defensive responsibility for major economic interests and the population.⁹¹⁶

MacDonald's attempts to redirect the thrust of the response did not diminish the military's enthusiasm for conventional campaigning. On July 27, 1948, Boucher explained his theory of victory to the local government in these terms:

My object is to break up the insurgent concentrations to bring them to battle before they are ready, and to drive them underground or into the jungle, and then to follow them there, by troops in the jungles, and by police backed by troops and by the RAF [Royal Air Force] outside of them. I intend to keep them constantly moving and deprive them of food and of recruits, because if they are constantly moving they cannot terrorize an area properly so that they can get these commodities from it; and then to ferret them out of their holes, whatever these holes may be.⁹¹⁷

His preferred instrument for these operations was the large unit sweep.⁹¹⁸ As Boucher indicated, offensive sweeps would disrupt the enemy and likely force him into a decisive engagement.⁹¹⁹ Boucher and other military leaders during this period downplayed the significance of the local Chinese and Malay populations. When they did relate their operations to the population, military leaders generally assumed that aggressive action would deter cooperation with the guerillas.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid., Short, pp. 116-117.

⁹¹⁶ Ibid., Short, pp. 115, 124-125.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid., Short, pp. 137.

⁹¹⁸ Riley Sunderland, *Army Operations in Malaya, 1947-1960* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, September 1964), RM-4170-ISA, pp. 132.

⁹¹⁹ These battalion and larger operations usually employed one of two operational concepts: cordon and search or hammer and anvil (Source: Sunderland, *Army Operations in Malaya*, pp. 126-127).

The coercive formula drew support from two hard line constituencies inside Malaya: the European planters and the Malay political leadership. The planters and other businessmen saw no point in conciliation with criminal elements who threatened their lives and livelihoods. In the words of one *Straits Times* editorial, the authorities should “Govern or get out.”⁹²⁰ Though this constituency consistently argued for tougher, offensive measures against the guerillas and their sympathizers, they constituted less than half a percent of the population and wielded nothing approaching the French *pied noir* veto power in local politics.⁹²¹ The Malay population and political leaders shared many of the Europeans’ views of the need to crack down on Chinese sponsored violence. Even before the declaration of the Emergency, the leading Malaya political figure of the time, the state minister of Johore, Dato Onn, argued in favor of the suppression of the MCP and its Chinese backers:

The time has now come when the Federation Government should firmly show by its action that it will have no truck with Communism in this country, that every step possible, every power that this Council can give, should be given to the police and others to maintain that law and order, to see that law and order is maintained in this country and that Communism is eradicated, and those responsible for bringing that ideology into this country should be banished for ever. I would further request that such action should be taken not only against the people who advocate Communism, but also against every foreigner, against every alien who comes to this land to agitate, to create trouble and to instigate the people. The fullest use of the law should be made to seek these people out and to send them back to their own country to ferment trouble there.⁹²²

Credit for curbing the “reflex actions” of the military and the ethnic Malaya leadership must go to the new High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, who arrived in November 1948. While Gurney did not overturn the military’s actions or soften the law and order agenda of the police, he sought to check military control and limit the scope of what might easily become an ethnic war between Malays and Chinese. Gurney made clear that General Boucher’s early bids to bring the police under military control would

⁹²⁰ Ibid., Short, pp. 68.

⁹²¹ Ibid., Short, pp. 332.

⁹²² Dato Onn as cited in Short, pp. 69.

not stand.⁹²³ Instead, he appointed a new Police Commissioner, Colonel W.N. Gray, and gave him responsibility for the coordination of the counterinsurgency campaign. On the political front, Gurney encouraged the development of a non-Communist counterweight to the MCP, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA).⁹²⁴

The results of the early Model 1 campaign were predictably mixed. On the positive side of the ledger, large unit offensive operations produced lopsided tactical results; encounters between guerillas and British security forces categorically ended in small victories for the counterinsurgents. In the process, the British generally pushed the guerillas out of a given geographical area, preventing the establishment of Maoist base areas.⁹²⁵ While the tactical feedback was uniformly positive, the results did not meet early expectations of decisive victory. Large unit operations conducted in the absence of intelligence produce very few significant engagements.⁹²⁶ Instead, British forces had to spend weeks of effort to kill or capture a relatively small number of guerillas. The two leading measures of effectiveness employed by British forces - the number of kills per contact and the number of “eliminations” per battalion – demonstrate the single-minded focus on the guerillas and neglect of the population and the Communist support network.⁹²⁷

Unable to eradicate the guerillas through direct action, many military leaders resorted to collective responsibility. Particularly in the first year of the war, British rules of engagement in Chinese areas were very loose and it was not uncommon for villages to be burned in retaliation for guerilla attacks. During this period, conditions often

⁹²³ Ibid., Short, pp. 140-141; *ibid.*, Stubbs, pp. 72.

⁹²⁴ Ibid., Short, pp. 265.

⁹²⁵ Ibid., Sunderland, pp. 126.

⁹²⁶ Ibid., Short, pp. 138; *ibid.*, Sunderland, pp. 131-132, 138.

⁹²⁷ Ibid., Sunderland, pp. 37, 50-51.

approached what Anthony Short has described as a “counter-terror” in which military frustration was taken out on the Chinese population.⁹²⁸

In Perak a Police report said of Colonel X that he “has been seven days in Malaya and is fully prepared to deal with the situation which he considers can only be met with fire and slaughter. He has been in India and assumes that Chinese react in a similar way to the Indian.”⁹²⁹

Nor was the problem restricted to the British military alone. Malay constables were hardly neutral parties in the charged ethnic environment, and the newly arrived Palestine Police veterans were notorious for their reliance on brute force against the population.⁹³⁰ The behavior of the security forces in the opening twelve months of the Malayan Emergency showed little recognition of the limits of collective responsibility and show of force coercion.

As in the French cases, the string of small, tactical victories against the guerillas reinforced the military command’s attachment to Model 1 strategy.⁹³¹ The British military reacted to the paradox of tactical success and campaign stalemate with a two part rationalization. First, they vigorously defended the basic paradigm of offensive action. General Ritchie, reflecting on the first three months of the insurgency, argued that the British had succeeded in arresting the development of the insurgency. He saw this success as a product of concentrated offensive action and he argued against any dispersion or defensive deployment.⁹³² Though the military was frustrated by the lack of intelligence on the guerillas, this was typically blamed on the police. Though he was not blind to the relatively inconclusive nature of the large operations, and the tendency of

⁹²⁸ Ibid., Short, pp. 160-165; *ibid*, Stubbs, pp. 73-74.

⁹²⁹ Ibid., Short, pp. 153.

⁹³⁰ Ibid., Newsinger, pp. 47-48.

⁹³¹ It is worth noting that the British defense establishment expressed a different concern at this time. Echoing a familiar bureaucratic theme, the British Defence Coordination Committee worried that counterinsurgency operations would diminish the preparedness of troops for future conventional in Asia or Europe: “Units and formations employed in anti-bandit operations in Malaya are seriously handicapped in carrying out their main peace-time task, namely preparation for war.” (Source: Short, pp. 229, fn 18).

⁹³² Ibid., Sunderland, pp. 30-31.

resistance to reappear in recently cleared areas, General Boucher argued as late as February 1950 that the answer was reinforcement under the existing strategy. Boucher emphasized that a shortage of troops had left him unable to exploit the opportunities brought by offensive action against the guerillas.⁹³³

Second, they blamed the absence of cumulative pacification on the weakness of the civilian and police apparatus. As General Harding, Boucher's immediate superior, argued, the failure to make cumulative progress against the insurrection could be traced to a failure of administration. Under these conditions, military reinforcement would not only expand the opportunities for decisive battle but also provide "the breathing space required by the civil and police authorities required by the civil and police authorities to put in hand the decisive measures that they alone can take."⁹³⁴ Harding, like Boucher, strongly implied that military efforts had been successful; progress had been held back by the failure of civil authorities to provide intelligence and administration. As Anthony Short has noted, the military strongly believed that this failure could only be overcome by a unification of the counterinsurgency under military leadership.⁹³⁵

Phase 2: The Briggs Plan (Model 2) (May 1950-February 1952)

Nearly two years of Model 1 strategy had failed to bring MCP resistance to an end. While the local military command contended that the underlying strategy was sound, extensive police powers, a near doubling in the number of British troops, a doubling of the regular police force, and the addition of 47,000 special constables had failed to roll back the ostensibly weak MCP insurgency.

⁹³³ Ibid., Short, pp. 225-227.

⁹³⁴ General Sir John Harding, Commander in Chief of Far East Land Forces, as cited in Short, pp. 233.

⁹³⁵ Ibid., Short, pp. 234.

If the local command remained firmly in the jaws of a learning trap, civilian observers and outside military leaders began to express doubts about the basic course. In January 1950, Gurney acknowledged that the combined efforts of the military and the administration had yet to deliver decisive results: "The political brains behind the Communist efforts remain for practical purposes untouched and unlocated."⁹³⁶ A month earlier, Field Marshal William Slim, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, emerged from a visit to Malaya convinced that the challenge was largely civil rather than military in nature. Slim seized on the intrinsic limits of the prevailing model of offensive operations:

The Army has for a long period kept the Communist bandits on the move and has inflicted minor losses on them.... The sequence of action seems to be that a band having been located in an area, a military force proceeds to beat through a wide expanse of jungle and locate the band. Contact is usually made with one or two individual bandits acting as outposts but the main body is able to evacuate its camp and disperse to rally again.... The Army then laboriously repeats the process. I had the trace of some of these operations plotted on the map and only too often the result was a circle; the Army drove the bandits from one place to another until after a few months the circle was complete and the bandits were back again in more or less the area from which they started. It seems to me the Army can go on doing this indefinitely, and so can the bandits. The only answer is that as the bandits are driven from an area a real effective civil administration steps in and with its Police and other forces takes complete administrative control of the area.⁹³⁷

Having grasped the inconclusive nature of offensive operations, Slim advocated a renewed focus on the civil component of the campaign: "...until it is recognized that the problem is by no means a military one, and that any military effort can only be subsidiary to and in support of a civil effort, we shall make no progress."⁹³⁸

The answer to stalemate was Model 2 strategy. As a compromise between the military desire to exert greater control over civil and police operations and the civilian

⁹³⁶ Sir Henry Gurney as cited in Anthony Short, "The Malayan Emergency" in Ronald Haycock (ed.), *Regular Armies and Insurgency* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1979), pp. 60.

⁹³⁷ Field Marshal Sir William Slim, "Note on tour of South-East Asia October 1949": report by Field Marshal Sir W Slim on the importance of civil action in counter-insurgency, Minutes by O H Morris and W C Johnson, November 1949, CO 537/4374, no. 5," in A.J. Stockwell (ed.), *Malaya: Part II: The Communist Insurrection, 1948-1953* (London: HMSO, 1995), British Documents on the End of Empire, Series B, Vol. 3, pp. 173-175.

⁹³⁸ *Ibid.*, Slim, pp. 175.

unease at militarized government, Gurney requested the appointment of a retired general officer to the civilian post of Director of Operations. The new Director, General (ret.) Harold Briggs, developed a new plan. Whereas earlier operations had focused almost exclusively on the pursuit of the guerillas, Briggs' Plan identified the guerillas' support base in the population as the center of gravity. This base organization, known as the Min Yuen, provided food, intelligence and general support to the MCP guerillas, the MRLA. By breaking the links between the Min Yuen and the guerillas, Briggs hoped to weaken the MCP and make possible cumulative progress towards the restoration of law and order.⁹³⁹

Briggs' plan was unmistakably Model 2 in its assumptions and chosen instruments. At its core was the recognition of the significance of the population and the MCP's supporters, the Min Yuen, in particular. As Briggs expressed to Gurney a week after his arrival, the real focus of operations should be the MCP cells rather than the guerillas:

Successes against the bandit gangs, though essential to security and morale, were in effect only a "rap on the knuckles." It is at this "heart" we must aim, to eliminate the Communist cells among the Chinese population to whom we must give security and whom we must win over. By doing so and removing the bandits' source of supply and information the task of the Security Forces would be simplified and the enemy forced to fight for these in areas under our control. Thus only can the initiative be wrested from the bandits.⁹⁴⁰

Equally important, Briggs' answer to this problem was fundamentally coercive and predicated on the passivity of that population. Skeptical of the potential for active Chinese cooperation, Briggs instead assumed that compulsory resettlement would deliver greater benefits:

⁹³⁹ Sir Harold Briggs, "Federation plan for the elimination of the communist organization and armed forces in Malaya' (the Briggs plan): report by COS for Cabinet Malaya Committee, CAB 21/1681, MAL C(50)23, Appendix, 24 May 1950," in Stockwell, *Malaya: Part II: The Communist Insurrection, 1948-1953*, pp. 216-221.

⁹⁴⁰ Harold Briggs as quoted in Short, *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats*, pp. 235.

The Chinese population is generally content to get on with its business even if it entails subsidizing the Communists; nor is it willing generally to give any information to the Police for fear of reprisals until it is given full and continuous security by our Forces. The Chinese have always had repugnance for joining Army or Police Forces; nor will they volunteer now at rates of pay lower than they can get in civil life, which are far greater than those earned by Malays. They are vocal and promise a lot, yet do nothing. Strangely enough compulsion is more acceptable than volunteering.⁹⁴¹

Briggs' plan was to resettle a sizable portion of the rural Chinese population in fortified camps. Once they had been resettled, the Chinese squatters could be more effectively protected, administered, and controlled. These camps, in combination with police outposts and later use of food denial operations, were to form the basis of a campaign of strangulation against the guerillas. The economic and social impact of uprooting the Chinese population, and the potential alienation of the resettled populations, were secondary considerations; the interruption of the connections between the population and the guerillas was considered far more important than the sentiment of the affected groups. Colonel Gray, a retired military officer and the Commissioner of Police, offered a defense of resettlement which was nearly indistinguishable from those offered by General Challe had in Algeria in 1959:

17D [deportation and resettlement] operations, Gray said, were the only single measure devised and used against armed Communism in Malaya which had achieved marked and indeed spectacular results in the task of restoring law and order. They had produced badly needed information of great value and had severely damaged the bandit effort, morale and support. Of this there could be no doubt. He conceded that there were objections. There was some political difficulty "in that politicians and so-called leaders may have some ground for complaint." Hardship and suffering was caused and sometimes presumably to innocent or helpless people.⁹⁴²

As in most Model 2 strategies, this reflected an implicit sequential theory of state control and political exchange; according to this line of reasoning, strict administrative order had to precede the reintroduction of active political debate.⁹⁴³ The Briggs Plan was a classic

⁹⁴¹ Harold Briggs as quoted in Short, *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats*, pp. 240.

⁹⁴² Colonel Gray as cited in Short, *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats*, pp. 193.

⁹⁴³ Ibid., Stubbs, pp. 206.

expression of one-way politics – a formula in which the underlying political dynamics and preferences of the parties were subordinated to the imperative of restoring state control in its most direct form.

The second major piece of the Briggs plan was its creation of unified administrative control in the form of the War Executive Committees. At every level, from national to district, representatives of each of the primary colonial agencies – civil administration, police, and military – met to coordinate government operations. This system was not without its costs; the effective integration of policy was purchased at the cost of decreased speed of decision and decreased latitude for the subordinate organizations. This change also meant a shift away from the independent employment of military forces towards one that nested such operations in the context of police activities and civil administration.

Though Briggs' first bid to "dominate" southern Malaya ended in a disappointing set of large unit operations, he quickly embraced a new set of tactics that combined police intelligence and small unit patrolling. As some units had independently discovered, troops were most likely to locate the enemy when their own unit was small in scale and they possessed detailed information on his probable location. In the absence of detailed information on the target, the probability of making contact in an ambush was 3.03% and in a patrol was 1.14%. When units acted on specific intelligence, the probability of contact rose to 10% and 5.88% respectively.⁹⁴⁴

⁹⁴⁴ These data refer to operations in 1952 and is drawn from the British Operational Research group's official reports (Source: Sunderland, *Army Operations in Malaya*, pp. 145).

Although the Briggs plan increased the efficiency of British security operations and increased the pressure on the MCP guerillas,⁹⁴⁵ it was neither costless nor decisive. Resettlement had embittered the affected populations and alienated many non-Communist Chinese leaders. Though the government attempted to buffer the impact of resettlement by extending small grants and allowances to the resettled groups, the process was unavoidably coercive and disruptive;⁹⁴⁶ settlers lost their dwellings, agricultural plots and were forced to resettle in fortified camps in which their movements were strictly controlled. The British encountered much the same tradeoff as the French in Algeria; resettlement brought undeniable military benefits at the cost of potential long term pauperization and alienation. Faced with this tradeoff, and relying on Model 2 assumptions about popular agency and motivation, Briggs opted to capture the military benefits and accept the political costs.

What saved resettlement in Malaya from the fate of the Algerian experiment was a fortuitous boom in rubber and tin prices. The Malayan economy was overwhelmingly dependent on commodity earnings and the Chinese furnished most of the labor in both industries. The outbreak of the Korean War brought an explosion in demand for both commodities. As the chart below indicates, the price of rubber quadrupled between 1949 and 1950, while tin prices nearly doubled.⁹⁴⁷ The positive shock of the commodity boom had three effects, all of which softened the blow of resettlement. First, the revenues of the Malayan Federal government expanded dramatically, enabling them to absorb the

⁹⁴⁵ Chin Peng later admitted that resettlement and food denial had imposed enormous pressure on the MCP (Source: C.C. Chin, Hack, *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, pp. 160).

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid., Short, pp. 292.

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid., Stubbs, pp. 110.

enormous cost of the Emergency and resettlement;⁹⁴⁸ the Malayan government fiscal balance swung from a deficit of \$13.4 million Malay dollars in 1950 to a surplus of \$289.9 million in 1951.⁹⁴⁹ Second, the expansion in profits enabled private firms to pay for the resettlement of their own Chinese workers.⁹⁵⁰ Third, and perhaps most significant, the commodity boom expanded Chinese employment and wages just as the shock of resettlement hit. Daily wage rates for unskilled labor rose from \$1.43 to \$2.90, while the more skilled rubber tappers earned between \$3.65 and \$4.35.⁹⁵¹ That this economic boom exactly coincided with the peak of Chinese resettlement was an extraordinary piece of good fortune. Without the boom, the political costs of the Briggs' Plan might have been prohibitive.⁹⁵²

⁹⁴⁸ Shortly before the invasion of Korea, the Colonial Office and the Exchequer were embroiled in a very bitter debate over the scale of British financial assistance to the government of Malaya. While the Exchequer was sympathetic to the needs of the Malayan Federation, it was unwilling to commit to unlimited support of the Emergency at a time when defense spending was already very high and the debt burden stifling. For detailed discussions, see the correspondence between Mr. Gaitskell (Exchequer) and Mr. Griffiths (Colonial Office) (A.J. Stockwell, *Malaya, Part II: The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 252-257, 270-272).

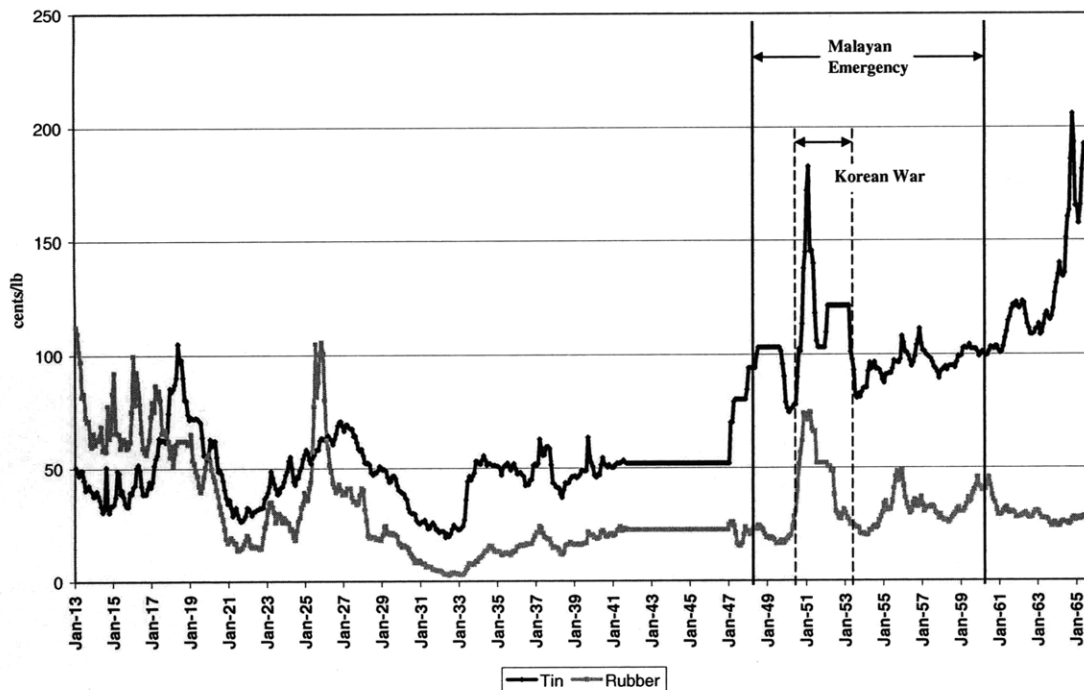
⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., Stubbs, pp. 111.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid., Stubbs, pp. 113-115.

⁹⁵¹ Ibid., Stubbs, pp. 113.

⁹⁵² The injection of wealth into the Chinese working classes also diminished the appeal of joining or remaining with the MCP insurgents.

Tin and Rubber Prices



While the boom helped cushion the shock of resettlement, Briggs' formula of War Executive Committees, resettlement and "dominating" tactics did not bring the desired results in the short term. Though Briggs and others had hoped to see major improvements within the first six to twelve months,⁹⁵³ most civil and military observers were deeply frustrated with the inability to make significant progress against the rebels. Though the number of rebels killed had increased in the latter half of 1950, the Minister of Defence observed in late February 1951, with the agreement of Field Marshal Slim and the Colonial Office, that "...no substantial progress has been made in Malaya. The

⁹⁵³ "'Federation plan for the elimination of the communist organization and armed forces in Malaya' (The Briggs plan): report by the COS for Cabinet Malaya Committee, 24 May 1950," in A.J. Stockwell, *Malaya, Part II: The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 221.

number of incidents fluctuated from month to month, but there was no sustained downward tendency.”⁹⁵⁴

The political atmosphere among the British administration, the Malay and Chinese leaders had grown increasingly poisonous. The High Commissioner Gurney was increasingly frustrated with the unwillingness or inability of the Chinese to contribute substantially to the suppression of the revolt.⁹⁵⁵ Malay leaders continued to lobby for increasingly harsh measures against the MCP and the Chinese population as a whole,⁹⁵⁶ while Chinese leaders called for greater political representation in the form of citizenship.⁹⁵⁷

Phase 3: State Consolidation (February 1952-1960)

Explanations of British success in the latter part of the Malayan Emergency typically focus on two elements: the Briggs Plan and General Templer, the charismatic civil-military supremo who implemented it in full. The underlying assumption is that Briggs Model 2 strategy was essentially sound, and that subsequent British success depended on energetic execution of this formula and the inspirational leadership of Templer.

⁹⁵⁴ Minister of Defence Shinwell, “Cabinet Office summary of a meeting at 10 Downing Street on 26 Feb called by Mr. Attlee to consider the [Briggs] plan’s slow progress, 27 February 1951,” in A.J. Stockwell, *Malaya, Part II: The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 277-278. For a similarly downbeat appraisal by a General Harding, see “Cabinet Office summary of a meeting resumed on 12 Mar to consider the progress of the [Briggs] plan, 13 Mar 1951,” in Stockwell, pp. 283-285.

⁹⁵⁵ Gurney’s most famous expression of these concerns was penned two days before his death. For the full document, see “[Gurney’s ‘political will’]: a note by Sir H Gurney expressing his frustration with the Chinese community, October 1951” in A.J. Stockwell, *Malaya: Part II: The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 300-301.

⁹⁵⁶ Their proposals included mass deportation of Chinese populations, confiscation of property, and the like. For details, see “Savingram no 83 from M V del Tufo to Mr. Lyttelton on meetings with rulers, *mentris besar* and Chinese leaders, 25-28 October 1951,” in A.J. Stockwell, *Malaya: Part II: The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 302-303).

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Short, pp. 269.

This narrative obscures the very significant shift in the content of British strategy and policy in early 1952. The Conservative victory in British parliamentary elections in October 1951, followed swiftly by the removal of all major local leaders of the British campaign, set the stage for a shift from the one-way politics of Briggs Plan to the two way politics of Oliver Lyttelton and Gerald Templer. While this new team built on Briggs' administrative foundation and reaped the benefits of resettlement, it was their recognition of the centrality of active Chinese cooperation that marked the decisive shift of the campaign as a whole. Where the Briggs' Plan alone was a recipe for perpetual, high cost, direct rule and rising ethnic tension, Lyttelton's new Model 3 policy and Templer's deft implementation of it swung the Chinese population into the government's camp and paved the way for the end of the Emergency.

The strategic search of late 1951 and early 1952 was the result of operational stalemate and a series of political shocks. As noted above, the consensus view by late 1951 was that the Briggs Plan, for all its tactical successes, had reached a new and costly plateau. While MRLA losses continued to mount in 1951, so too did the number of MRLA attacks. What is more, the growing number of kills did not appear to have made a significant impact on the guerillas' end strength. The first political shock came with the death of the High Commissioner in an MCP ambush on October 6, 1951. Though Gurney does not appear to have been the target of the ambush,⁹⁵⁸ his death dealt a severe blow to morale and leadership. With Briggs' retirement looming in December 1951, the civil-military leadership of the campaign would soon be gone. The Conservative party's victory in British elections in late October brought a major shift in Colonial policy and personnel and a reassessment of the Malaya policy. James Griffith, the outgoing

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid., C.C.Chin, Hack, *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, pp. 156.

Secretary of States for the Colonies, informed his successor, Oliver Lyttelton, that the Attlee government had reached an impasse: “At this stage it has become a military problem to which we have not been able to find an answer.”⁹⁵⁹ With Lyttelton’s replacement of the Commissioner of Police Gray in January 1952, there had been a clean sweep of the local and metropolitan leadership.

Though most observers expressed frustration with the stalemate, their prescriptions varied. Recently retired Field Marshal Montgomery expressed his opinion that the outgoing civilian administration, including Gurney, had been excessively focused on the political dimension:

It was commonly supposed that Gurney was good. It is natural that after his murder he should have had a build-up; but this was not really justified. He was certainly a very good Chief Secretary in Palestine 1946/47. But in Malaya he concentrated on the political problem; he was never able to handle the bandit problem; he did not understand how to keep law and order in the Federation, and he was unable to give clear guidance and direction.⁹⁶⁰

Oliver Lyttelton, who spent the month of December 1950 assessing the situation on the ground, came away with roughly the opposite conclusion. Emphasizing that the Emergency was “in essence a Police rather than a military problem,” he argued that Chinese cooperation and a more effective and ethnically balanced Police force were the keys to unlocking the problem:

If the present situation had to be summed up in one sentence it would run: “You cannot win the war without the help of the population, and the Chinese population in particular, and you cannot get the support of the population without at least beginning to win the war.”... It is axiomatic that we must gain the support and help of the Chinese population and involve them much more deeply in the struggle. One of the greatest weaknesses today, which is unfortunately bound to persist for a long time, is that the Police – both the Regular Force and the Special Constabulary – are overwhelmingly Malay, while those whom they are terrorizing are overwhelmingly Chinese. In the face of this

⁹⁵⁹ James Griffiths as cited in John Cloake, *Templer: Tiger of Malaya, The Life of Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer* (London: Harrap, 1985), pp. 199-200.

⁹⁶⁰ Field Marshal Lord Montgomery, “[Appointment of Templer]: letter from Field Marshal Lord Montgomery to Mr. Churchill. Enclosure: “Success in Malaya’, note by Montgomery (M/222, 2 Jan 52),” in A.J. Stockwell’s, *Malaya: Part II: The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 358-359.

handicap it is hard to gain the confidence of the population, to increase the flow of intelligence and to concert the proper counter-measures.⁹⁶¹

In his official report on the trip, he laid out what would later become the core of the new Malaya policy.⁹⁶² Some of these reforms were administrative: greater centralization of the counterinsurgency effort under a new civil-military supremo, the appointment of two deputies, one political and the other military, and the revitalization and retraining of the police force. The weightiest elements, however, were explicitly political. Since at least the 1920s, the central issue in Malayan politics had been the political status of Chinese residents. Lyttelton realized that the resolution of the Emergency and the fate of an independent Malaya depended on a mutually acceptable agreement on Chinese citizenship and land tenure.

Templer, for his part, showed a keen understanding of the politics of exchange and willingness to subordinate military strategy to political imperatives. Whereas General Boucher had resisted civilian participation in strategy, seeking to subordinate the police to military control and resist the imposition of restrictions on Army action, one of Templer's first moves was to ask for clear political guidance from Churchill and the Cabinet. Emerging from his personal interview with Churchill in January 1951, Templer stated his appreciation of the problem to Lord Moran in these terms:

The military problem is nothing. The police question can be set right. The civil service difficulty can be solved. What we have to do is to get the Malay and the Chinaman, with their different languages and religions, the followers of Confucius and Islam, to say "This is our country."⁹⁶³

⁹⁶¹ Oliver Lyttelton, "'Malaya': Cabinet Memorandum by Mr Lyttelton. Appendices I-XV, 21 Dec 1951" in A.J. Stockwell's, *Malaya: Part II: The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 322.

⁹⁶² Lyttelton's December 1951 trip report is reproduced in full in A.J. Stockwell's, *Malaya: Part II: The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 318-353.

⁹⁶³ Lord Moran, *Churchill: Taken from the Diaries of Lord Moran* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), pp. 387.

His openness to close cooperation with the civilian leaders inside and outside Malaya, British, Malaya, and Chinese, made possible the development of the social coalition that broke the back of the MCP from 1955 on.

What explains the choice of a Model 3 strategy in late 1951? First, civilian leaders were actively engaged in the development of the new strategy. The record strongly suggests that the Lyttelton/Templer plan was a conscious departure from the Model 2 Briggs Plan, and that Lyttelton and the Colonial Office were its primary authors. This civilian input was expressed in the selection of Templer⁹⁶⁴ and reinforced by his willingness to work with the civil authorities in Malaya and London. Second, the choice was driven by increasing financial austerity. The British government remained overextended, and Lyttelton realized that this made indirect rule and eventual independence unavoidable:⁹⁶⁵ “The influence of the British has now in fact to be exercised by persuasion rather than direction.”⁹⁶⁶ Equally important, the end of the tin and rubber boom in 1952 meant that the windfalls of 1950 and 1951 would not be available in perpetuity. A strategy based on the perpetual, direct rule of 25% of the Chinese population was impractical; material escalation, either by London or Kuala Lumpur was impossible. Third, Templer broke with the Model 1 and Model 2 frameworks of his predecessors, correctly identifying political compromise as the heart of the problem.

⁹⁶⁴ Had others been chosen for Templer’s position, the outcome might have been quite different. The shortlist included General Sir John Harding, Marshal of the RAF, Sir Arthur Harris, General Sir B. Robertson, Field Marshal Slim, Marshal of the RAF, Lord Portal, Lieutenant-General G C Bourne, and Lieutenant-General Sir R Scobie (Source: Oliver Lyttelton, “[Appointment of Templer]: telegram no T6/52 from Mr Lyttelton to Mr. Churchill, 4 Jan 1952,” in A.J. Stockwell, *Malaya: Part II: The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 356).

⁹⁶⁵ Oliver Lyttelton, “ ‘Malaya’: Cabinet memorandum by Mr. Lyttelton, 21 Dec 1951,” in A.J. Stockwell, *Malaya: Part II: The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 330.

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid., Lyttelton, pp. 321.

Many outsiders assumed that the appointment of General Templer as High Commissioner and senior military commander, a British de Lattre,⁹⁶⁷ would signal an intensification of the military campaign. Instead, as Robert Thompson and Anthony Short have noted, Templer's first moves in country were political.⁹⁶⁸ His first act as High Commissioner was to read a directive, prepared by the Cabinet, the Colonial Office and Templer himself, that laid out the new policy of the government. The directive stated that the British government was committed to self-rule, a united Malaya, and common citizenship.⁹⁶⁹

Templer's subsequent actions demonstrated his commitment to a Model 3 approach. Whereas the early resettlement push had been dominated by the drive for population control and the interruption of the links between the Min Yuen and the guerillas, Templer began to address the political costs of resettlement. Early in his tenure he began to address issues of land purchase and land tenure – items that would provide the resettled communities with a greater degree of social and economic stake in the new system.⁹⁷⁰ Similarly, Templer enacted a Village Charter that established local councils in many of the “New Villages.” These councils, elected by the Chinese residents, were made responsible for local tax collection, and local administration.⁹⁷¹ This, combined with the development of Chinese local self-defense forces, signaled a fundamental shift in government policy towards the Chinese population. Whereas Gurney and Briggs

⁹⁶⁷ A number of observers inside and outside the government made explicit comparisons to de Lattre as they considered the option of appointing a military leader to a unified civil-military post.

⁹⁶⁸ Sir Robert Thompson, *Make for the Hills: Memories of Far Eastern Wars* (London: Leo Cooper, 1989), pp. 98; Ibid. Short, “The Malayan Emergency” in *ibid.*, *Regular Armies and Insurgency*, pp. 62.

⁹⁶⁹ “[Templer's instructions]: directive issued by Mr. Lyttelton on behalf of HMG, 1 Feb 1952,” in A.J. Stockwell's, *Malaya: Part II: The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 372-373.

⁹⁷⁰ Ibid., Short, pp. 340; *ibid.*, Stubbs, pp. 339.

⁹⁷¹ Ibid., Short, pp. 342, 402; *ibid.*, Stubbs, pp. 189-190, 218-219.

tenure had been marked by rising tensions between the authorities and the Chinese, Templer sought to relieve restrictions and promote cooperation.⁹⁷²

Similarly, Templer increased the attention paid and funds devoted to amnesty programs. Amnesty proposals had been discussed early in the Emergency but vetoed or watered down by several powerful constituencies: Malay politicians, police and military, and European settlers. All argued that amnesty enabled those responsible for the violence to escape punishment for crimes against individuals and the society; the distribution of monetary rewards for surrender was even more objectionable: “As one Australian soldier remarked, the terrorists who were caught were treated like murderers, while those who surrendered were ‘treated like kings.’”⁹⁷³ Nevertheless, Templer endorsed Greene’s “fair treatment” pledge and the Surrendered Enemy Prisoner (SEP) classification which enabled captured insurgents to escape punishment by cooperating with their captors. Templer also supported large increases in the scale of the rewards offered for surrender or capture of senior MCP leaders.⁹⁷⁴ Though these amnesty programs did not have their greatest effect until 1957 and 1958, Templer’s enthusiasm demonstrated his belief that military threats and credible guarantees of fair treatment were complementary; the former provided the positive pressure and the latter the reassurance that defectors would be shielded from retaliation.

Templer’s decision to increase rewards and amnesty was a part of a larger effort to provide positive incentives for Chinese cooperation. Across a range of issues, from

⁹⁷² Simon C. Smith, “General Templer and Counter-Insurgency in Malaya: Hearts and Minds, Intelligence, and Propaganda,” *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Autumn 2001), pp. 65-66.

⁹⁷³ Robert W. Komer, *The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of a Successful Counterinsurgency Effort* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, February 1972), R-957-ARPA, pp. 74.

⁹⁷⁴ Kumar Ramakrishna, “‘Bribing the Reds to Give Up’: Rewards Policy in the Malayan Emergency,” *War in History*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2002), pp. 341-342.

deportation to collective punishment, Templer reduced the weight of coercive measures in order to convince the Chinese community that they were not collectively the target of state suppression. Templer's decision to declare "white areas" in which the most restrictive Emergency measures were lifted once violence had fallen to an acceptable level was the final expression of this partial relaxation of coercion. As Templer pointed out, the conditional relaxation of food control and other measures gave the local population a tangible stake in the maintenance of law and order:

There is no doubt that by strictest possible control of food supplies and restrictions on movement of food, vehicles and individuals in certain areas and at certain times, we have imposed a great strain on the CTs [Communist Terrorists]....It has however long been my feeling that it would give a great fillip to morale if I could raise some of these irksome restrictions on the liberty of the individuals in areas where...it could be safely done....A scheme of this sort might have considerable results. Apart from its repercussions on public opinion outside Malaya, it might well have a great effect for good on the local population here, encouraging those people in areas where restrictions are still, of necessity imposed, to co-operate more freely with Government to remove the CTs so that they could also reap the benefits of greater freedom. Quite apart from these aspects it is, I consider, essential we should in any case keep ERs [Emergency Regulations] constantly under review.⁹⁷⁵

By selectively relaxing controls, Templer acknowledged that coercive direct rule was necessarily temporary and that long run stability depended on the willing cooperation or consent of a large portion of the Chinese population. Beating the MCP was as much a question of reintegrating MCP members and supporters as it was one of finding and eliminating them through direct military action.

Though subsequent observers have labeled Templer's agenda a "hearts and minds" campaign, this has led to the impression that his appeal was based largely on propaganda. In reality, the Lyttelton/Templer plan was had more to do with bargaining than advertising; it established a set of quid pro quos at the local and national level designed to reward Chinese cooperation. Chinese communities were given greater

⁹⁷⁵ Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer, "[White area in Malacca]: inward savingram no 1480/53 from Sir G Templer to Mr Lyttelton on a proposed relaxation of emergency regulations in part of the Settlement, 28 Aug 1953" in A.J. Stockwell, *Malaya: Part II: The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 469.

political power and exposed to fewer acts of state coercion in return for political participation and assistance in the fight against the MCP. Neither the Chinese/Malay electoral alliance of 1955, nor the participation of Chinese citizens in the counterinsurgency campaign, was a demonstration of new affective bonds between the Chinese and the British or Malays. Instead, they represented a political compromise in which the Malays received greater security and self-rule and the Chinese received citizenship, land tenure, and conditional release from the harshest of the Emergency regulations. [Persuasion through exchange, not persuasion through clever advertising]

Postwar interpretation: The “Lessons of Malaya”

The immediate impact of Malaya on British conduct in other insurgencies was more limited than its prominence in our contemporary literature might suggest. As Hew Strachan has noted, Malaya did not become a model for British counterinsurgency until the late 1960s;⁹⁷⁶ it was American observers who were more interested in lessons that might be applied to the emerging conflict in Vietnam.⁹⁷⁷ While the British appeared to replicate important successes in their campaigns in Borneo,⁹⁷⁸ their conduct in Kenya and Cyprus more closely resembled the disaster in Palestine.

To the extent that the British attempted to generalize the lessons of Malaya, their reaction was to discount the significance of circumstance, late war Model 3 strategy, and

⁹⁷⁶ Hew Strachan, “British Counter-insurgency from Malaya to Iraq,” *RUSI Journal*, December 2007, Vol. 152, No. 6, pp. 10.

⁹⁷⁷ John J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War: The Strategy of Counter-insurgency* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966).

⁹⁷⁸ The less frequently cited case of the British war in Borneo (1960-1964) is another example of the successful integration of civilian leaders into the conduct of low-intensity, military operations. In Borneo, as in Malaya, it was active civilian restraint that delivered political success; civilian insistence on limits on cross-border operations against Indonesian forces left open the possibility of a face-saving end to the war. For a detailed discussion of the Borneo campaign, see Christopher Tuck, “Borneo 1963-1966: Counter-Insurgency Operations and War Termination,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Winter 2004).

luck and overstate the importance of tactical or administrative routines. Three major circumstances strongly favored the British in the campaign. First, the MCP insurgency was limited to the Chinese population. Second, the MCP never obtained substantial external support from Russia or China. Third, favorable geography meant that there were no easy sanctuaries where the MCP could refit. Fourth, the Malayan economy's dependence on cash crops made food denial operations unusually effective against the rebels. Chance, in the form of the Korean War tin and rubber boom, played an equally important part in cushioning the financial and political impact of Briggs' resettlement push. Without the boom, the effect of resettlement might have been much closer to that seen in Algeria.

Most accounts of the Malayan Emergency identify the Templer era as the turning point without providing a compelling explanation of his contribution. The tendency has been to treat the Briggs Plan as the blueprint for victory and Templer as a particularly effective and energetic executor of that Plan. As noted above, this ignores the deep flaws of Briggs formula with its singular emphasis on direct rule, population control, and food denial. Lost in these accounts is any recognition of the political compromise drawn up by Lyttelton and implemented by Templer. The British offer of independence in return for recognition of Chinese citizenship and land tenure was the key to winning Chinese elite cooperation in the Emergency and acceptance of the new order. The relaxation of Emergency controls in "white areas" and the provision of land grants to rural Chinese squatters brought major changes in Chinese status and political orientation. Without such compromises on the local and national level, the Briggs Plan would have been a recipe for open ended, authoritarian administration of resettlement camps by British and Malay

leaders. The roles of Templer and Lyttelton are central to understanding the origins of search and its result. Most accounts overemphasize the personal role of Templer while neglecting that of Lyttelton. While Templer played an central role in the execution of the policy, it was Lyttelton who selected Templer and Lyttelton and who altered the course of the Briggs strategy. A civilian politician was responsible for changing the military's course and bringing the Model 2 experiment to an end. It was not a case of the military arriving at a second political epiphany on its own.

What the British military did retain was overwhelmingly tactical in nature. A 1952 primer sponsored by Templer and written by Walter Walker, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya (ATOM)*,⁹⁷⁹ was the most prominent example of the obsession with tactical innovations. Like its close cousin, the United States Marine Corps Small Wars Manual, the ATOM was a summary of standard solutions to the challenges of small war in a jungle theater. While the manual included brief references to the Briggs Plan and other strategic issues, it was essentially a collection of routines: how to conduct jungle patrols, how to locate MCP bases, how to employ firepower, etc.. Though some of the routines were specific to the Malayan context or counterinsurgency, the vast majority fell into the “dual use” category: routines or skills that were applicable to both conventional warfare and counterinsurgency.

The retention of lessons of Malaya was, as the theory would predict, highly selective. Favorable circumstances and random shocks were discounted,⁹⁸⁰ while the Model 3 elements of late war strategy were ignored or repackaged as ancillary elements

⁹⁷⁹ *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya*, Third Edition (1958) (St. Petersburg, FL: Hailey Publishing, 2006).

⁹⁸⁰ Writing in 1966, Robert Tilman highlighted the fundamental differences between the British problem in Malaya and the American one in Vietnam (Robert O. Tilman, “The Non-Lessons of the Malayan Emergency

of Briggs' Model 2 formula. By contrast, tactical routines were treated as decisive and generalizable; their distribution in the form of the ATOM manual was the most significant direct inheritance of the Malayan experience.

The British Cases and the Theory

Palestine and Malaya offer an important test of the external validity of the theory. The British cases are distinct in a number of ways. They involved different national and organizational cultures, different settings and different outcomes. Britain had not suffered the same national trauma as France in the Second World War, and it might be reasonable to assume that their more stable governmental situation would have produced a different pattern of organizational learning. What is more, the British have generally been considered the leading Western authorities on counterinsurgency, and many have traced this to their ability to accumulate best practices and avoid the missteps of other great powers.

What is striking is the degree of similarity between British and French responses to insurgency. In spite of significant differences in national and organizational culture, the British military faced the same cognitive and bureaucratic obstacles to functional adaptation in the intrawar and interwar period. In Palestine and Malaya, the illusion of familiarity led to a reflexive application of Model 1. The stimuli of insurgency triggered an application of coercive force against the armed guerillas and crude attempts to cow the population into submission or cooperation. In both cases, the small victories against the insurgents led the British military into a learning trap; leaders assumed that strings of tactical victories were proof of the effectiveness of Model 1 strategy. When confronted

with stalemate or deterioration, the first response was exploitation: the refinement of operational concepts and normative or material escalation. In Palestine, the campaign collapsed at that stage as Britain withdrew and transferred responsibility to the UN.

In Malaya, after two years of small victories and a steady deterioration of security, the military adopted a Model 2 strategy centered on population control. Even this militarized form of politics was an uncomfortable fit for many in the British military: As one observer noted,

The Army never felt comfortable in their role of supporting civil power; they were soldiers, many of them said, fighting with one hand tied behind their backs. They were irritated by the slow, methodical tactics of the police. For their own part, the police were becoming irritated with the Army's superior attitude.

Operations were carried out on a basis of compromise between the police and military methods. There was always divided authority on any large scale operation involving troops and police. There was the inevitable clash between the soldier trained to deal with the enemy by all means within his power in the quickest possible time, and the policeman trained to act only after the fullest investigation and after convincing himself that he had got the right person.⁹⁸¹

The trigger for late war search were the high cost stalemate of the Model 2 Briggs Plan and the wholesale leadership change that followed Gurney's assassination and Conservative victory in London. The choice of a Model 3 strategy under Lyttelton and Templer was shaped by the two factors predicted in the model: high levels of active civilian participation in the formulation of strategy and policy, and mounting resource pressures.

The interwar behavior of the British military was equally dysfunctional. In the wake of each campaign, the interpretation of recent experience was distorted by bureaucratic interests and the military operational code. Through the period, the British defense establishment was concerned with maintaining the conventional readiness of the

⁹⁸¹ Harry Miller, *Menace in Malaya* (London: Harrap, 1954), pp. 137 as cited in Komer, pp. 49.

force and resisted counterinsurgent duties that might undermine it.⁹⁸² While the immediate pressure of other colonial uprisings in Cyprus and Kenya prevented a violent swing from counterinsurgency to conventional war, the British military sought to economize on hot counterinsurgencies in favor of conventional rearmament in cold theaters.

Most important, the military operational code distorted the interpretation of experience. Even after the British force ratios in Palestine reached the level of one soldier for every five Jewish inhabitants, the most popular military explanations for the failure of martial law were manpower scarcity and excessive civilian restraint. After Malaya, the most popular explanation for the success was some combination of the Briggs Plan and tactical innovation; local and national political concessions to the Chinese and Malay communities in 1952 were generally ignored.

These professional beliefs proved remarkably durable. Field Marshal Montgomery, a veteran of the Irish rebellion and the Arab Revolt, and the leading proponent of escalation and martial law in 1947, reacted to midwar stalemate in Malaya by casting blame on civilian restraint and the politicization of small war. Though there were important exceptions to this professional misinterpretation,⁹⁸³ the median response of senior military leaders was remarkably consistent and dysfunctional. For every Templer or Leclerc, there were four to five senior commanders wedded to Model 1 or Model 2. Though lower level leaders may have been less rigid in this respect, these beliefs were broadly shared and deeply held. The military operational code explains both the rarity and instability of Model 3 strategies.

⁹⁸² Ibid., Short, pp. 229.

⁹⁸³ General Barker in Palestine and Field Marshals Slim and Templer are the clearest examples of Model 3 advocates among senior British military officers.

Chapter 8

The Domestic Challenge: The Thai Insurgencies (1965-1983)

For almost two decades, the Thai state waged a campaign against Communist insurgents on the northern and southern borders of the Kingdom. The Thai case offers compelling evidence of the dominant patterns of learning dysfunction, their causal origins and the leading sources of variation. In spite of substantial prewar investments in Model 2 population security and development projects, the Thai state responded to the outbreak of resistance in 1965 with the Model 1 reflex. After a year of ineffective, large unit operations against the guerillas, the Thais reassessed their strategy and moved to a Model 2 strategy loosely based on the Briggs Plan.

Continued deterioration of security and mounting military impatience led the army to seize control of strategy in 1968 and embark on a Model 1 campaign. The army pursued this strategy in all four of the major regional strongholds with the familiar tools and predictable results. Large scale offensive sweeps and lavish use of firepower produced positive tactical feedback but inflamed local tensions. For almost six years, the army adhered to a Model 1 strategy as guerilla strength and the level of violence continued to rise.

In 1973, a series of political and material shocks triggered a third reassessment and a return to Model 2 strategy. The second period of Model 2 strategy failed to bring about a collapse of the Communist insurgents; instead, the fall of Saigon in 1975 and the return of military government in 1976 led to a rapid expansion in the scale and capability of the insurgent forces. In 1979 and 1980, a new series of internal and external shocks

set the stage for a final search. The resulting Model 3 strategy brought about the rapid collapse of all three regional insurgencies.

The history of the Thai insurgency makes plain the role played by rival causal beliefs about the relationship between violence and resistance. From 1965 through 1980, most Thai military officers treated the insurgency as insignificant in scale and military in nature. The solution to this military problem was the direct application of force. A much smaller military faction drew inspiration from the British campaign in Malaya and the advice of American civilian advisers; they saw the problem as one of administrative coordination and population control. The third faction only emerged only after eight years of steady deterioration in security; this third group reframed the challenge in terms of political exchange - the provision of status and wealth to notables in exchange for submission to state authority.

The Political Backdrop

Between 1965 and 1983, the Thai state rested on three pillars: the monarchy, the bureaucracy and the military. Strong popular reverence for the monarch was the source of authority in the political system, while the actual business of governance fell to a highly centralized bureaucracy in Bangkok. The military was the strongest voice in the bureaucratic system and its animosity towards the police was longstanding and politically rooted.⁹⁸⁴ Military government was the norm during most of the period, with the only period of civilian rule coming between October 1973 and October 1976.

⁹⁸⁴ Police and army competition for power in Thailand dates to the 1940s and 1950s.

Thailand was composed of two large ethnic groups and a series of much smaller ones. Some 53% of the population was ethnic Thai, while 27% belonged to the Laotian group. The remaining ethnic minorities were the Chinese (12%), the Malays (4%), the Khmer (3%), and various hill tribes (<1%). While ethnic Thais made up the majority of the population, the regional concentration of these minorities along the borders of the Kingdom set the stage for the outbreak of resistance in the mid 1960s. With the exception of the Chinese, the ethnic minority groups were concentrated in specific areas along the frontiers. Three of these ethnic groups, the Thai-Lao in the Northeast, the hill tribes in the North, and the Malays in the South, would become the focal points of insurgent activity between 1965 and 1983.

Single Sponsor, Single Agent, Multiple Insurgencies

The agent of Communist insurgency in Thailand during this period was the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), a Sino-Thai movement with ideological and financial ties to the Communist Party of China.⁹⁸⁵ While nearly all insurgents in this period depended on CPT support and leadership, the rebellions were local in origin and motivation. In the Northeast, the rebellion has an ethnic Laotian base and CPT cadre; the primary motivation for rebellion appears to have been economic underdevelopment and resentment of central government intrusion. In the North, the insurgency was again led by CPT cadre but composed primarily of the ethnically and culturally distinct, Meo hill tribes. In the deep south, the Communists mobilized a mix of ethnic Malaya separatists and Chinese Communist fighters expelled from Malaysia at the end of the British

⁹⁸⁵ R. Sean Randolph, W. Scott Thompson, *Thai Insurgency: Contemporary Developments* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981), The Washington Papers, Vol. 9, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University, pp. 10-13.

Emergency. All three major rebellions shared common features.⁹⁸⁶ Each developed in a border region where Thai state authority was at its minimum and the terrain was at its most forbidding. Each capitalized on specific local grievances and a general distrust and resentment of Bangkok's authority.

The CPT appears to have launched its armed struggle in August 1965 in response to orders from the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC).⁹⁸⁷ Whether the Chinese sought to destabilize the Thai state or simply punish the Thais for offering air bases to the Americans, there is strong evidence that the CPT's decision to launch armed struggle was external in origin.⁹⁸⁸ As prisoner reports would later reveal, the first wave of CPT cadre were drawn from local communities, trained in North Vietnam at a training base near Hoa Binh, and then reinserted to start the rebellion.⁹⁸⁹

⁹⁸⁶ There was a third and much smaller insurgency in the mid-South comprised mainly of Thai bandits. The scale of the insurgency and its political dimension are small enough to exclude it from this account.

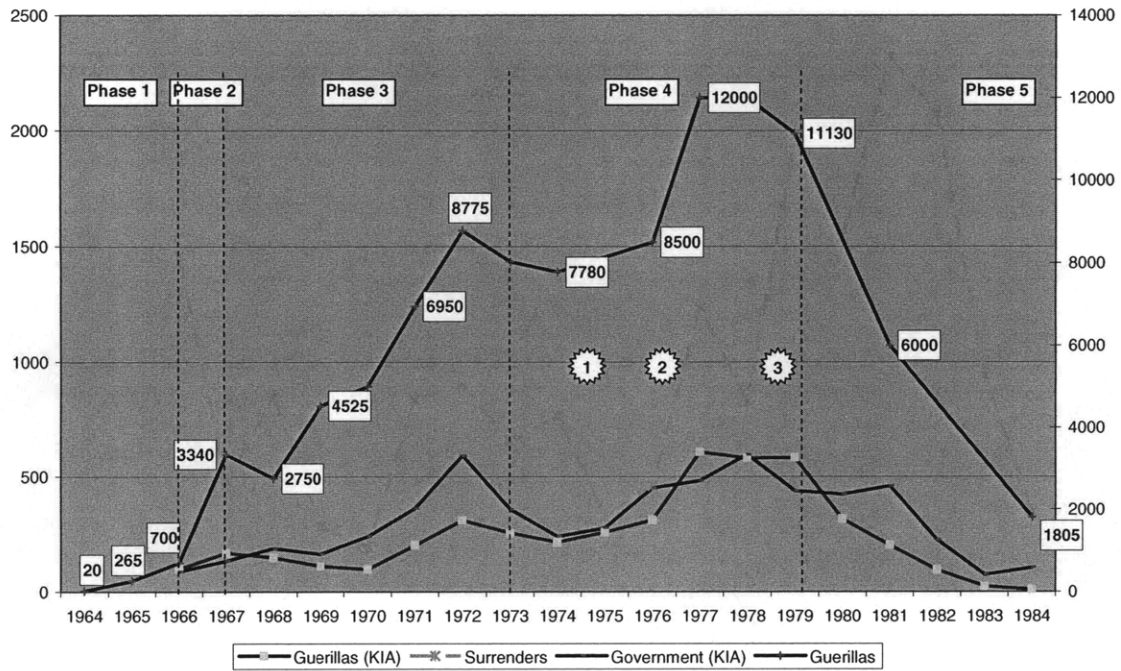
⁹⁸⁷ George K. Tanham, *Trial in Thailand* (New York: Crane, Russak and Company, 1974), pp. 48-49; Thomas A. Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (New York: Frank Cass, 1996), pp. 23.

⁹⁸⁸ R. Sean Randolph, *The United States and Thailand: Alliance Dynamics, 1950-1985* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1986), pp. 84-86.

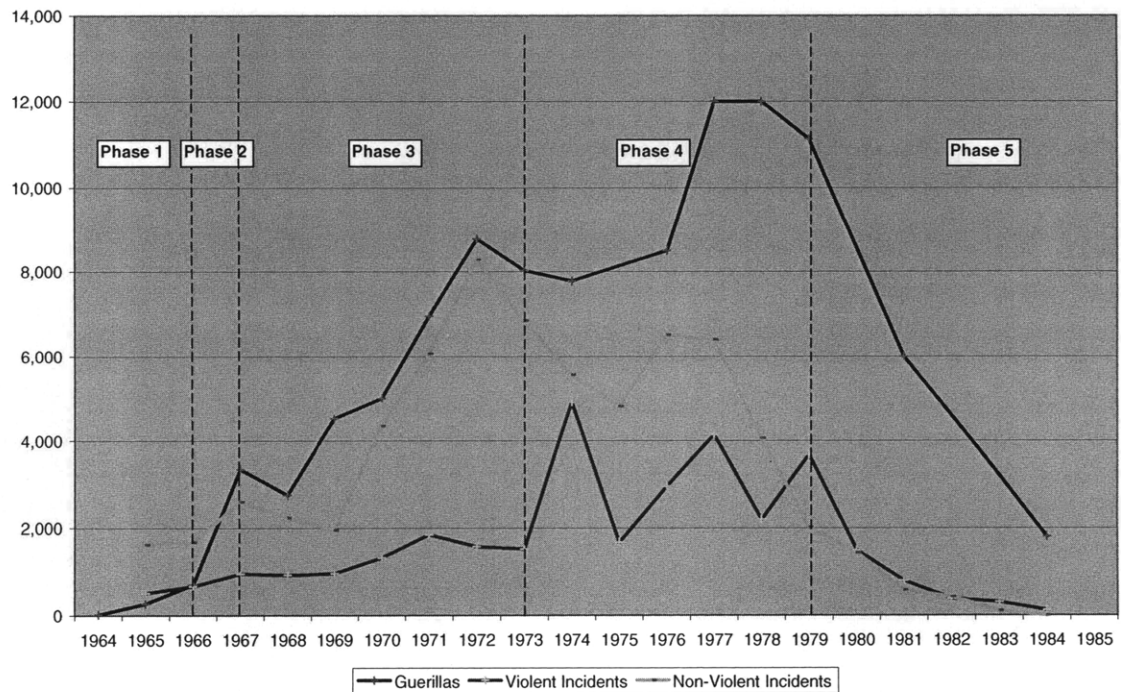
⁹⁸⁹ Jeffrey Race, "The War in Northern Thailand," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1974), pp. 94.

Thailand (1965-1983)	Phase 1: Patterned Response and Small War	Phase 2: Civil-Police-Military (CPM): Population Security and Development	Phase 3: Army control and the Counter- guerilla War	Phase 4: Instability and the Search for Solutions	Phase 5: Political Concession and State Consolidation
	(8/65-12/66)	(1/67-12/67)	(1/68-10/73)	(11/73-3/1980)	(4/80-10/83)
Military Commanders	Prapass Charusathiara	Saiyud Kerdphol	Tongcherm Sangkhanich (2 nd Army) Aung Potigant (3 rd Army)	Prem Tinsulanonda (2 nd Army)	Prem Tinsulanonda (Prime Minister) Chavalit Yongchaiyud Saiyud Kerdphol
Strategy	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Operational Innovations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search and Destroy • Large scale sweep operations in Northeast • Heavy firepower (Air, Artillery) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) • Civil-Police-Military Concept • 09/10 Plan • Psychological operations • Economic development (ARD/MRD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search and Destroy • CSOR • CSOC Downgraded • Martial law in Northeast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self Defence Volunteer Programme (Aw Paw Paw) • Rangers • Village Scouts • Prem's Model 3 Experiments (2nd Army) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prime Minister's Order 66/2523 • Open Arms Policy (Amnesty) • Payoffs • Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC) • Civil service and political party inclusion • Patronage and informer networks in restive areas
Success/ Failure	Trend Failure	Stalemate	Trend Failure Episodic Failure (1972 Operations)	Episodic Failure (Shocks) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1975 Fall of Saigon/American Withdrawal • 1976 Coup • 1979 PAVN invasion Kampuchea Episodic Success <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prem and Model 3 Experiments in Northeast 	Success
Resources (Manpower)	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Resources (Equipment)	Low	Low	High	Medium	Medium
Civilian Participation	Low	High	Low	Medium	High
Task Pressure	Low	Low	Low	Medium	High

**Loss Ratios and Insurgent Strength:
Thai Insurgencies (1965-1983)**



Violent and Non-violent Incidents (1965-1985)



Phase 1: Patterned Response and Small War (8/1965-12/1966)

Between 1960 and 1965, the Thai government sought to prevent the emergence of resistance in the underdeveloped border areas of the North and Northeast. During this period, several American agencies, including USAID, CIA, and the Army Special Forces, funded and sponsored efforts to immunize the border regions using a mix of police programs and economic development.⁹⁹⁰ The theory behind these measures was to extend the state's span of control and address perceived economic grievances. By pushing government agents into previous ungoverned spaces, and spending government monies on infrastructure development, the planners hoped to eliminate the breeding grounds for violent resistance.⁹⁹¹ Thus, when the CPT attacks launched its first attacks against police and village leaders in the summer of 1965, the primary state agents in those areas were the Border Patrol Police (BPP) and the civic action teams – the Mobile Development Units (MDUs).

In spite of this multi-year program of Model 2 immunization, the Thai state's initial response to the outbreak of insurgent violence was to apply Model 1. In late 1965 and 1966, the army ordered battalion sized, cordon and search operations to flush the guerillas out of their sanctuaries along the border. These operations involved the lavish application of air support and artillery fire against suspected targets.⁹⁹² The Thai army's diagnosis and prescription had clear roots in the military operational code. The stimulus

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid., Randolph, pp. 88-89.

⁹⁹¹ Kusuma Snitwongse, "Thai government responses to armed communist and separatist movements" in Chandran Jeshurun, *Governments and Rebellions in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), pp. 253-253.

⁹⁹² Ibid., Tanham, pp. 86; *ibid.*, Kusuma, pp. 256; Thomas A. Marks, "Thailand: Anatomy of a Counterinsurgency Victory," *Military Review* (January-February 2007), pp. 38.

of organized, armed resistance produced an illusion of familiarity. This in turn influenced the military's judgments about the scale of the problem and the appropriate treatment. If the rebellion was military in nature, then the scale of the challenge was a function of the number and military capabilities of the guerillas. In comments to one of his subordinates, the Army Commander in Chief and Deputy Prime Minister General Prapass expressed a quintessential Model 1 perspective in December 1965:

If we divert enough resources to this effort we'll crush the communists in six months.⁹⁹³

Given the modest number of guerillas present, it was only natural to assume military action and material escalation would enable the Thai state to prosecute an effective, low cost campaign against these guerillas.

The results of these early operations were disappointing. Even though the army managed to kill a number of guerillas, the majority escaped the unwieldy operations. The indiscriminate application of force inflamed tensions among the local population. The number of guerillas in the Northeast nearly tripled in the first year of the operations and violent and non-violent resistance activity rose dramatically. As in the early phases of the Algerian and Malayan campaigns, the army expressed its mounting frustration by imposing collective responsibility on population. As one military observer noted, military attitudes towards the population moved from simple indifference to active intimidation:

Some people were impatient....Our programmes depended on winning people over to our point of view and this often meant maintaining patience, sometimes with great difficulty. Especially when the communists were using extreme terrorist methods, there were military people who wondered why we should take so long. "Why not go in there, simply and quickly," they asked, "and use military force to crush the insurgents?" In those days, area commands were in the hands of older soldiers who did not understand what we wanted to do. I respect this older generation; they are my brothers. But the military alone could not do the job, and occasionally punitive action only made

⁹⁹³ General Saiyud Kerdpol, *The Struggle for Thailand: Counter-insurgency 1965-1985* (Bangkok: S. Research Co., Ltd., 1986), pp. 13.

matters worse. In one well-documented action at Ban Phon Ngam in the Northeast in 1966, for example, women were raped, two men (one later found not to be a communist) were tortured, and an unknown number of villagers summarily executed.⁹⁹⁴

The early Thai response was a classic demonstration of the military operational code in counterinsurgency. The stimulus of armed resistance was enough to undo several years of Model 2 preparations. The resulting Model 1 strategy produced positive tactical results and rapid deterioration on the campaign level. Army frustration with the elusive guerilla opponents often spilled over into crude attempts to punish or intimidate local populations into cooperation.

Phase 2: The Civil-Police-Military (CPM) Model: Population Security and Development (Model 2)

The failure to contain the insurgency in 1965 and 1966 led to a year long trial of Model 2 strategy. Thai strategy shifted from a direct attack on the guerillas to the control of local populations. The choice of Model 2 was a function of at least four factors: individual insight on the part of Saiyud Kerdpol, the precedent of the pre-1965 Model 2 programs, U.S. civilian advisory input, and the perceived lessons of Malaya. These made Model 2 a ready alternative to the early and unproductive military campaigns of the first year.

From the start, a small group of Thai military officers had seen the answer to insurgency in Malayan style, population security – an approach they referred to as Civil-Police-Military (CPM). The leading proponent of this new doctrine, Saiyud Kerdpol, drew his inspiration from Briggs' Model 2 initiatives in Malaya and his two major

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid., Saiyud, pp. 16.

innovations were the intellectual descendants of the British campaign.⁹⁹⁵ The first was the establishment of the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) in December 1965 under Saiyud's control. Like the War Executive Committees in Malaya, the CSOC was designed to coordinate the joint efforts of police, civilian administrators and military. During this period, the CSOC functioned as an executive headquarters, directing the employment of all forces, civilian, police and military, in a target area.

Saiyud's second step was to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to defeat the insurgency. If the War Executive Committees were the model for the CSOC, the Briggs Plan was the model for the 09/10 Plan. Using the existing infrastructure of BPP teams and MDU civic action teams, Saiyud sought to secure a series of areas in the Northeast (see figure below). As Saiyud would recount in a speech in 1969, the target of government efforts was the local population rather than the guerillas:

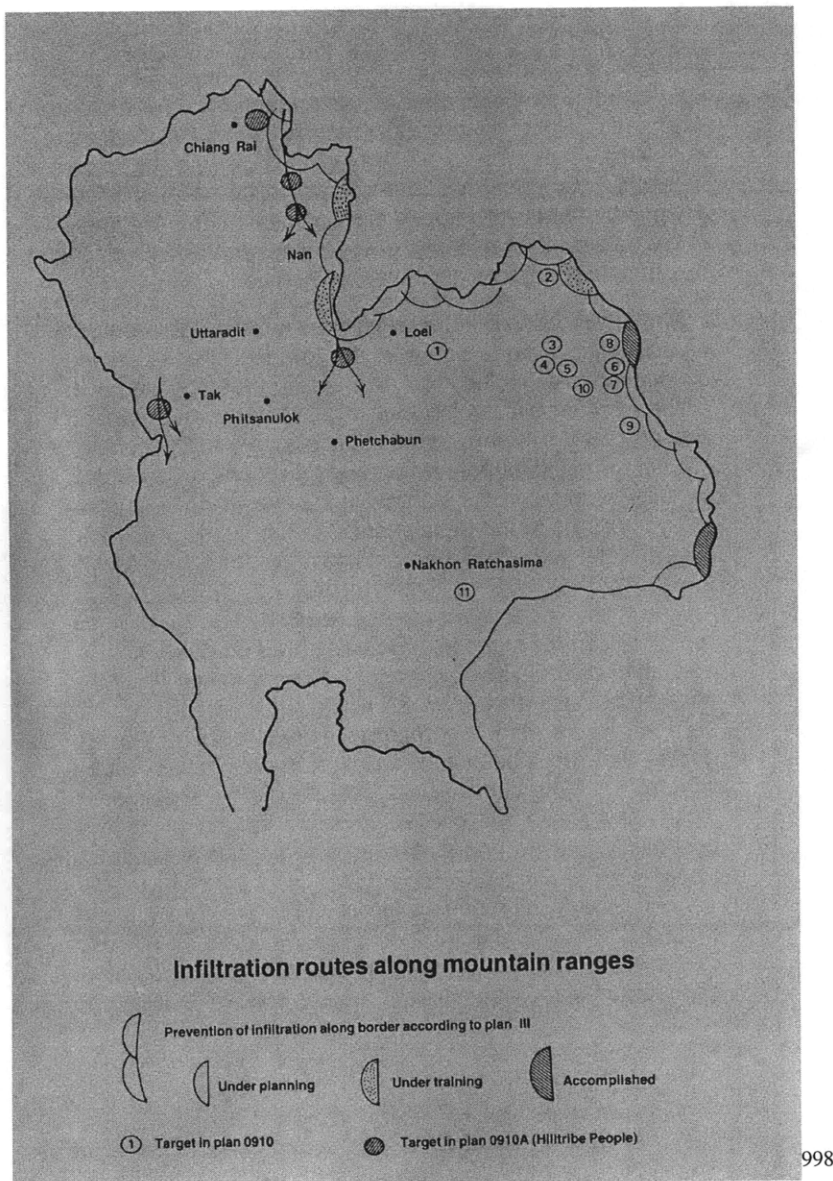
CSOC came to understand very quickly the dangers inherent in attempting to rely on force alone in suppressing the communist terrorists. We also realized that our goal should be not only to eliminate the insurgents but also to win over the people to the government. Winning the people, in fact, is the key to success....In this indirect approach, it is the people themselves who become the focus of operations or the "target."⁹⁹⁶

The key, in Saiyud's opinion, was to break the link between the population and the guerillas through a mix of population control measures and small unit pursuit. Each threatened village was to develop a Village Security Team (VSTs), and the state was to provide additional security, economic assistance and psychological indoctrination.⁹⁹⁷ While Saiyud's initial focus was squarely on the Northeast, the outbreak of resistance in the North in late 1967 led him to develop a similar scheme known as Plan 09/10A.

⁹⁹⁵ George Tanham as cited in foreword to Saiyud Kerdpol, *The Struggle for Thailand*, pp. 5.

⁹⁹⁶ Ibid., Saiyud, pp. 42-43.

⁹⁹⁷ Ibid., Saiyud, pp. 27-28, 43-44; ibid., Kusuma, pp. 257.



While Saiyud's 09/10 Plan produced important gains in the areas of village security and development, these gains were not as rapid, decisive or permanent as his sponsors had hoped. Many of the CPT guerillas were pushed out of the target areas, but they were able to regroup and return at a later date. When villages were forced to confront the return of the guerillas, they proved unequal to the task.⁹⁹⁹ The economic elements of Saiyud's plans were based on a tenuous theory of influence. U.S. civilian

⁹⁹⁸ This map is drawn from Saiyud Kerdpol, *The Struggle for Thailand*, pp. 45.

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid., Kusuma, pp. 257.

advisors and their Thai protégés had assumed that economic development would reduce resistance and bolster state authority. In practice, the pre and post 1965 development programs often failed to produce the anticipated political benefits. The state's centralized provision of economic assistance produced new inequalities within and between regions; in some instances local populations moved to threatened areas in order to capture the perceived gains of these preferential aid programs. In still other instances, the guerillas themselves claimed credit for attracting additional government investments.¹⁰⁰⁰ For all these reasons, the simple theory of influence based on the technocratic distribution of economic development aid seldom produced the anticipated increases in state authority.

Equally important, the introduction of the CSOC proved deeply unpopular with the major regional commanders in the Thai army. As in the British War Executive Committee system, the centralization of authority in the hands of an interagency headquarters diluted the power and influence of the army commanders.

Phase 3: Army Control and the Return to Counter-guerilla War (1/1968-10/1973)

In October 1967, the Royal Thai Army reasserted direct control over the counterinsurgency campaign. Although the CSOC nominally survived this transition, control over the employment of military assets returned to the regional army commanders.¹⁰⁰¹ From 1968 through 1980, the CSOC served more as a coordinating body than an operational headquarters. This change in organizational structure was accompanied by a return to Model 1 strategy. Once in place, the Model 1 strategy would persist for nearly six years.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ibid., Kusuma, pp. 253-254.

¹⁰⁰¹ Douglas S. Blaufarb, *Organizing Counterinsurgency in Thailand, 1962-1970* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, August 1972), R-1048-ARPA, pp. 31.

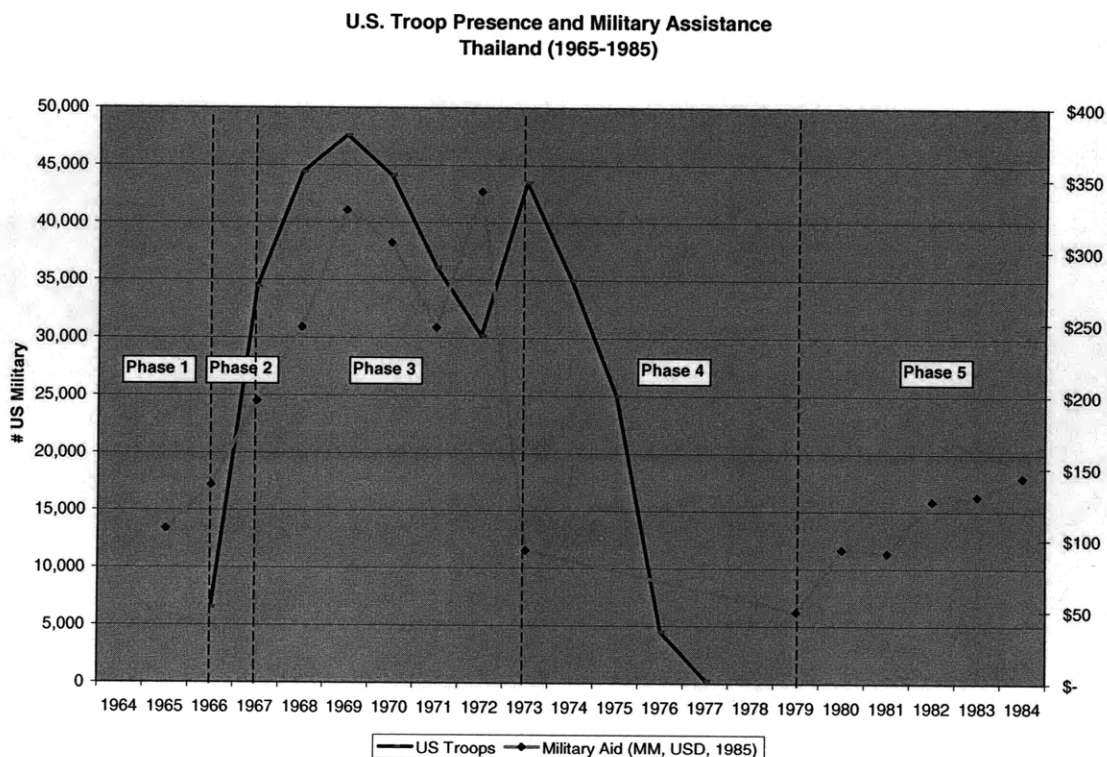
The decision to move from Saiyud's 09/10 Plan to a more direct, military campaign was shaped by several factors. First, Saiyud's plan had not stopped the expansion of the rebellion or produced visibly decisive results in the targeted areas. While Saiyud had argued that the patient application of these methods would yield results, the short term results did not support this position. Second, the majority of the Thai army had never abandoned the Model 1 framing of the insurgency. In the military's eyes, the solution to a small armed uprising was the more energetic application of conventional force.

Third, the high command was uncomfortable with an arrangement that subordinated senior military commanders to the interagency, CSOC headquarters. In a state run by the army, an idea that upset the military hierarchy and advanced the interest of other agencies including the police was highly suspect. Fourth, the move from Model 2 to Model 1 coincided with exponential increases in American military assistance and troop presence. Though American servicemen did not participate in combat against the Thai Communists, escalation in Vietnam brought a surge in U.S. military personnel and investment at the major Thai airbases. Fifth, the decision to change strategy came while task pressure remained low. Few in the Thai military or state considered the rebellions in the Northeast and then the North immediate threats to state survival.¹⁰⁰² The arrival of American aid and American troops further dampened fear of the insurgents and the incentives to act against them.

The expansion in U.S. troop presence and military aid influenced Thai strategic choice in three ways. First, it lifted the material constraints on strategic choice. By 1967,

¹⁰⁰² Donald Nuechterlein, "Thailand: Another Vietnam?" *Asian Survey*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (February 1967), pp. 128.

American military assistance had nearly doubled from a 1965 figure of \$30.8 million to \$59 million. As one scholar has pointed out, this surge in aid may have reinforced underlying preferences for a Model 1 approach: “military aid without proper implementation based on an appropriate doctrine made little significant contribution [to Thai counterinsurgency] and may have encouraged the stress on active/suppressive measures by the Thai military.”¹⁰⁰³



Second, the rapid expansion in military aid changed the balance of power within the Thai state and the U.S. advisory effort. While American aid had been more balanced in the years between 1960 and 1965, the new injection was overwhelmingly military in nature. Earlier programs had funneled resources to the police and civic action programs; the post-1965 funds flowed primarily to the Thai military and were administered directly

¹⁰⁰³ Ibid., Kusuma, pp. 268.

through the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG). These changes reinforced the influence of the Thai military in the counterinsurgency campaign at the expense of police and civilian perspectives. Third, the surge in aid came in the form of military hardware rather than manpower.¹⁰⁰⁴ As such, it gave the Thai military new tools to apply American, firepower intensive doctrine.

The army's new strategy was unquestionably Model 1 in content. As noted above, the CSOC was reduced to a coordinating body while real authority was transferred to the Communist Suppression Operations Regions (CSORs) – commands that corresponded to the existing Army level commands for the North, Northeast, Center and South. Instead of a single, interagency plan to defeat the insurgency, the Thai army pursued first two and later four separate regional campaigns whose content depended on the views of the Thai high command and the regional commanders themselves.¹⁰⁰⁵

One of the first major operations under the new order was a joint Thai/Laotian army sweep from east to west designed to drive CPT guerillas into a screen line of Thai border police (BPP) teams along the northern border. The large scale operations increased the number of contacts with guerillas but cost the border police 10% of their strength in the space of two months. With the loss of these highly trained, police cadre, fluent in local languages and adept at small unit patrolling, the Thais had to rely on large unit, conventional operations. Thai army operations involved a mix of aerial bombardment, artillery fire and enforced evacuation of hill tribe settlements. This pattern of operations made it nearly impossible for the BPP teams to remain in close contact with local populations. In further recognition of the new prominence of the army in

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid., Tanham, *Trial in Thailand*, pp. 152.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid., Tanham, *Trial in Thailand*, pp. 87.

counterinsurgent campaign, all police operations had to be approved through the regional army commander.¹⁰⁰⁶

The army's assumption of control in the Northeast undermined the limited successes of the 09/10 Plan.¹⁰⁰⁷ In the North, where the outbreak of violence coincided with the army's assumption of control, Model 1 strategy set off an ethnic war between Meo tribesmen and the Thai military. The army was no more effective in slowing the growth in the guerilla forces than the CSOC had been; even as the army brought its greater numbers and firepower to bear, the numbers of Thai government casualties rose more quickly than the CPT losses. The estimated strength of the Communist guerillas in 1968 was 3,340; in that same year the Thai government killed 169 guerillas. By 1972, guerilla strength had risen to 8,775 while the number of guerillas killed that year reached 309. In spite of these disappointing results, the Thai military persisted on this same basic course for nearly six years. So long as the revolt remained on the periphery, and Thailand was the recipient of lavish military assistance and a large, American troop presence, there was little positive incentive to change strategy.

Conventional, large scale operations reached their apex in February 1972 with a division level attack on a communist base camp near Phu Kwang in the North. The month long operation, which involved 10,000 army troops, copious amounts of aerial firepower and artillery, and a significant American advisory presence, ended in more or

¹⁰⁰⁶ Jeffrey Race, "The War in Northern Thailand," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1974), pp. 102-104.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid., Saiyud, pp. 117.

less total failure. The Thai army suffered between 300 and 600 casualties and reached the core of the base area to find it deserted.¹⁰⁰⁸

Phase 4: Instability and Search for New Solutions (10/1973-3/1980)

Several developments explain the Thai strategic search in late 1973. The first was the trend failures of the Model 1 strategy of the preceding period. The Communist rebellion continued to grow in the North and Northeast, while a new resistance movement had begun to spring up in the south. Episodic failures such as the attack on Phu Kwang reinforced the sense that material escalation was unlikely to arrest the deterioration in security. Second, the American moves towards Vietnamization signaled the end of the de facto American security guarantee. With North Vietnamese expansion and American withdrawal, the Thais needed to confront the possibility of insurgent threats from the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese as well as the existing Chinese sponsored CPT.

The only immediate alternative to the Model 1 strategy was a return to some variant of Saiyud's Model 2 formula. As Saiyud himself noted in 1977, the ineffectiveness of Model 1 had become unavoidably clear by 1973:

...from 1971 to the uprising of 14th October 1973, the army finally learned...the negative lessons of a purely military approach to the problem. Throughout the second period, military sweep operations contributed only to the statistics of clashes, killed and wounded. After this, the army had little choice but to fall back on CSOC's CPM approach.¹⁰⁰⁹

While Saiyud's Model 2 formula was the only ready alternative, the CSOC remained unable to influence the conduct of the regional campaigns directly. Instead,

¹⁰⁰⁸ David Morell, "Thailand: 1972," *Asian Survey*, February 1974, pp. 170-171; *ibid.*, Tanham, pp. 98; *ibid.*, Kusuma, pp. 256.

¹⁰⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Saiyud, pp. 117.

initiative in the counterinsurgency campaigns fell to the army leadership and the regional commanders.¹⁰¹⁰

In the absence of a clear national plan, the most significant development in Thai strategy was the appointment of the new, Third Army commander: General Prem Tinsulanonda. Though Prem had had very little exposure to the insurgency problem prior to assignment his assignment to the Northeast in 1973, he began to develop a Model 3 formula that would serve as the basis for the final war winning strategy of the 1980s. Prem immediately recognized the seriousness of the situation and the bankruptcy of the Model 1 strategies of his predecessors.¹⁰¹¹ While his answer incorporated elements of Saiyud's CPM model, he laid much greater emphasis on retail political engagement with the traditional leaders of the region. Rather than simply extending the direct rule of Bangkok, Prem sought to attract local leaders and incorporate them into a system of indirect rule. The primary tools in this Model 3 strategy were de facto amnesty, financial patronage and retail politics.

While Prem began to make significant progress in the Northeast, the chronic instability of the civilian governments in Bangkok sapped much of the motive force from the counterinsurgency campaign between 1973 and 1976. Civilian sought to rein in some of the military's excesses, but did little to develop or implement a national alternative to Model 1 or Saiyud's Model 2 solutions. In spite of this strategic drift, the growth in the scale and intensity of the insurgency leveled off in the first three years of this interregnum. Though the insurgents held far larger base areas than at the start of the

¹⁰¹⁰ Ibid., Tanham, pp. 157.

¹⁰¹¹ William Warren, *Prem Tinsulanonda: Soldier & Statesman* (Bangkok: Eastern Printing Co., 1997), pp. 70-71.

The rise in North Vietnamese power raised the specter of increased insurgent activity and even conventional threats to the state. The failure to renegotiate a bilateral agreement on American assistance and troop presence in Thailand in early 1976 left the Thai state with no ally to counter rising internal and external threats.¹⁰¹³ Though the Thais sought to hedge their risks by normalizing relations with Beijing in 1975, this partial thaw did not bring an immediate end to the Chinese relationship with the CPT.

The second shock was the Thai military coup of October 1976. Mounting concerns about the internal external security of the Kingdom led the Thai military to overthrow the civilian government. Unlike many Thai coups, the 1976 coup turned violent and 42 students were killed and some 200 wounded in clashes at Thammasat University.¹⁰¹⁴ The immediate impact of the crackdown was to drive an estimated 2,000 students and an additional 2,000 rural Thais into the arms of the CPT.¹⁰¹⁵ The rapid expansion in the scale of the insurgency added still more pressure to develop some effective solution to the internal threat.

The final shock came in December 1978 with the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea. The prospect of 150,000 and 200,000 North Vietnamese troops on the borders of Thailand forced the Thais, Chinese and Americans to re-evaluate their response.¹⁰¹⁶ Vietnamese expansion led the Chinese to cut ties with the CPT and focus their energies on funding the Khmer Rouge remnants seeking refuge in Thailand. The Americans began to consider a resumption of military aid to the Thais. From the CPT's

¹⁰¹³ R. Sean Randolph, pp. 194-199.

¹⁰¹⁴ Frank C. Darling, "Thailand in 1976: Another Defeat for Constitutional Democracy," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp.127.

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibid., R. Sean Randolph, W. Scott Thompson, pp. 30.

¹⁰¹⁶ William Turley, Jeffrey Race, "The Third Indochina War," *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 38 (Spring 1980), pp. 92.

point of view, the North Vietnamese invasion was a disaster. The war brought CPT's longtime sponsor, the PRC, into conflict with the North Vietnamese and their Path Lao allies, the powers controlling the insurgents' major sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos. Rising frustration among the young Thais who had joined the movement after 1976 only amplified these strains and led many of these urban recruits to surrender to the government.

The choice of Model 3 strategy in 1980 was a product of Prem's insight and an increasingly precarious internal and external environment. In the Northeast, Prem had witnessed first hand the limits of Model 1; in his five years as Third Army commander, he had found consensual political engagement with existing local leaders to be more profitable than brute force or direct rule. Prem was supported by a two reformist factions in the Thai army, the Young Turks and the Democratic Soldiers, both of whom advocated a renewed focus on the political dimension of the counterinsurgency campaign.¹⁰¹⁷ The rising threat of direct or indirect Vietnamese aggression made internal consolidation imperative. This step change in task pressure made it easier for Prem and other proponents of Model 3 to overcome cognitive and bureaucratic resistance to their new formula. Though the Americans had begun to take an interest in Thai defense after a five year hiatus, the Thais lacked the resources to pursue a Model 1 escalation. The final element was the opportunity provided by the CPT's rising difficulties.

Prem announced his new strategy on April 23, 1980 in Prime Minister's Order 66/2523. The plan had two major elements. The first was the explicit subordination of

¹⁰¹⁷ Leading members of the Young Turks and the Democratic Soldiers had witnessed firsthand the failure of American Model 1 strategies during their tours in Vietnam. The Young Turks saw the answer in a Model 2 solution while the Democratic Soldiers emphasized the consensual accumulation of political support.

military operations to what he called a “continuous political offensive.”¹⁰¹⁸ As he had as regional commander in the Northeast, Prem’s answer lay in expanded political participation and indirect rule. His object was “to transform the armed struggle into a peaceful means.”¹⁰¹⁹ The tangible expression of this political offensive was a generous amnesty offer – the so-called “Open Arms” policy in which former insurgents were pardoned and often rewarded with positions of authority. The second prong of the offensive was military. Eager to take advantage of the CPT’s weakness and division, Prem ordered a series of offensives against the exposed CPT bases in the North and Northeast. As military pressure mounted, the release valve was the amnesty program.¹⁰²⁰

While the hallmark of Prem’s political offensive was the “Open Arms” amnesty policy, it was simply the most visible element a larger attempt to forge a “social contract”¹⁰²¹ between the state and the inhabitants of the border regions. The government curtailed abuses by troops, police and soldiers. At the same time, the state offered existing political leaders, including former insurgents, status and funds. Previously marginal groups were offered posts in the civil service and local administration. State funded, patronage networks gave local leaders a stake in the suppression and prevention of violence. Stripped of its support among the population and particularly the traditional local elites, the CPT was unable to maintain its power in the base areas. Prem’s social contract was a means of binding the border regions to the center through “structural

¹⁰¹⁸ Prem Tinsulanonda as cited in Sarochna Robbamrung, “Internal Security, Kingdom of Thailand,” USAWC Military Studies Program Paper, (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 1987), pp. 1.

¹⁰¹⁹ Prem as cited in

¹⁰²⁰ Ibid., Kusuma, pp. 261, 266.

¹⁰²¹ Duncan McCargo, “Behind the Slogans: Unpacking Patani Merdeka,” in Duncan McCargo (ed.), *Rethinking Thailand’s Southern Violence* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2007), pp. 3;

corruption” and expanded participation in local governance.¹⁰²² General Chavolit, Prem’s deputy in the strategy, embarked on a campaign of retail politics in the Northeast and the North to secure the cooperation of the populations which had supported the CPT rebellions.

In the space of just over three years, the CPT rebellions collapsed under pressure from Prem’s primarily political strategy. As the graphs of insurgent strength and activity show, mass surrenders drove the number of insurgents from a 1979 peak of 12,000 to 1,800 by 1984; during the same period, violent and non-violent insurgent activity plummeted to twenty year lows. The progress was so sweeping that the state announced in October 1983 that they had scored a “complete victory” over the Communist insurgents.¹⁰²³

The Thai Case and the Model

The theory predicts that militaries from different national and organizational cultures will behave in essentially the same manner when exposed to the stimulus of insurgency. Militaries will respond to insurgency by applying Model 1 solutions. When Model 1 produces mixed feedback, the first recourse will be exploitation not exploration. When exploration occurs, Model 2 is the most likely result – militaries will tackle the problem of mass politics by forcing it into the logical framework of battle. Model 3 strategies will be the last to be embraced by military leaders; they are likely to emerge only after Models 1 and 2 have been repeatedly demonstrated to be bankrupt. During interwar periods, the disappearance of task pressure will lead to a selective purge; tactical

¹⁰²² Duncan McCargo, “Thaksin and the Resurgence of Violence in the Thai South” in McCargo, *Rethinking Thailand’s Southern Violence*, pp. 39-41.

¹⁰²³ Ibid., Saiyud, pp. 184.

routines, particularly “dual use” routines will be retained while Model 2 and particularly Model 3 strategies will be jettisoned.

When militaries depart from these dominant patterns, it will be the result of changes in the specified variables. Some combination of high task pressure, high civilian participation and resource scarcity will be necessary to push militaries towards Model 3 solutions. Model 3 equilibria are inherently unstable; even small increases in resources or dips in task pressure or civilian participation, will encourage militaries to revert to more congenial Model 1 or Model 2 strategies. Finally, we should expect to see the influence of the causal constants and independent variables expressed through the specified causal mechanisms.

The Thai case strongly supports the core predictions of the theory and suggests that the explanatory range of the theory may be relatively high. If learning behavior varied by national or organizational culture, or based on the distinctions between domestic and expeditionary counterinsurgency, then we would expect the Thais to respond differently. Instead, the Thai case reveals striking similarities between the organizational responses of a small, Asian state and two European, imperial great powers. The same cognitive and bureaucratic obstacles that impeded learning and retention in the expeditionary counterinsurgencies of France and Great Britain are clearly present in the Thai case.¹⁰²⁴

In spite of tremendous differences in context and organizational culture, the adaptive path followed by the Thai military mirrors that of the French and British. The initial Thai response was reflexive. In spite of five years of Model 2 investments in the

¹⁰²⁴ Further examination of other Asian insurgencies such as those in Burma and the Philippines would be required to establish this finding with greater certainty.

North and Northeast, the Thai military reacted to organized resistance by applying Model 1 strategies: large unit attack on the guerillas to break the enemy and intimidate the population. When a year of this treatment failed to slow let alone roll back the progress of the rebellion, the Thais flirted with a Model 2 alternative that drew on U.S. funded, prewar programs. This liberal experiment collapsed under the pressure of rising guerilla action and massive infusions of American military aid. The reversion to Model 1 lasted from 1968 to 1973. Falling resources and rising task pressure explain the subsequent march from Model 2 (1973-1979) to Model 3 (1980).

Even after Prem's Model 3 strategy delivered a decisive victory over the insurgents, the Thai state appeared unable or unwilling to retain the most important strategic insights of the campaign. General Saiyud, the leading Thai proponent of Model 2, remained deeply suspicious of Prem's reliance on amnesty. When violence again erupted in the Thai south in 2004, the Thai state responded in much the same way they had in 1965. The progress of Thai strategy in this new rebellion had an amnesiac quality; a military that had learned to resolve rebellion in the same area in the 1980s applied the strategies of the 1960s with depressingly familiar results.¹⁰²⁵

The two causal mechanisms most closely associated with the military operational code were clearly present in the Thai case: the illusion of familiarity and learning traps. The illusion of familiarity explains both the Model 1 reflex of 1965 and the 1968 reversion to this solution. The opinions expressed by Thai military leaders in 2004 betray the same underlying logical difficulties. When confronted with armed resistance, most officers saw the familiar outlines of interstate war; having framed resistance in military or

¹⁰²⁵ Ibid., McCargo, pp. 45-54.

criminal terms, they measured the scale of the challenge by counting the number of armed opponents.

Learning traps were equally prominent in the Thai case. When Model 1 solutions were applied, the results were typically mixed; guerillas seldom won engagements initiated by government forces and these “small victories” typically inflicted damage on the inhabitants and their property. The overweighting of positive military feedback and the underweighting of political intangibles reinforced the military’s attachment to Model 1 strategy. Micro-success and macro-stalemate made escalation in scale, firepower and ruthlessness the logical next step. When the Thais pursued Model 2 strategies, they fell into a slightly different learning trap. Having accepted the importance of politics, the Thais, like the French in Algeria and the British in Malaya, struggled to measure their progress in this new domain. Compared with battlefield results, the allegiance of the population was intrinsically more difficult to measure. This difficulty was compounded by the coercive nature of Model 2 strategy; local populations were unlikely to express their genuine preferences to the government wardens who controlled their security and material survival. For these reasons, leaders tended to focus on measures of performance rather than measures of effectiveness. Rather than measure political opinion, they used their own benevolent acts as proxies for political progress. The number of roads, schools and dispensaries built, the number of indoctrination sessions held, and the like were held up as proof of government authority. Like the French in rural Algeria between 1957 and 1962, the Thais fell prey to what David Hackett Fischer has called the “quantitative

fallacy.” Unable to measure opinion, they fell back on “the idea that the facts which count best count most.”¹⁰²⁶

Often the ultimate objective of changing people’s attitude to one that was favorable to the government was forgotten in favor of the more tangible yardstick of quantitative accomplishment, such as so many kilometers of roads built, so many wells dug and so many visits by the health team.¹⁰²⁷

By focusing on their own performance of tasks rather than their intangible effects on local opinion, Thai leaders systematically overstated the effectiveness of Model 2 strategy. Until 1980, they tended to equate control and authority, only to be repeatedly surprised by the reemergence of resistance in previously “pacified” areas.

The Thai case also demonstrates the power of resource swings to influence the timing and result of strategic choice. The massive surge in American material assistance between 1967 and 1973 strongly influenced the decision to break with Saiyud’s Model 2 strategy in favor of Model 1. When the flow of resources was reversed in the mid 1970s, the Thai military was forced to explore less profligate alternatives. All three resource mechanisms were present: budget constraints, resource weighting of influence, and factor input effects. Budget constraints were absent in the early stages of the insurgency but were increasingly significant from 1973 on. So long as the scale of the threat was small relative to the resources available to combat it, the Thai military preferred to apply Model 1. In the late 1970s, however, the rising threat of direct or indirect Vietnamese aggression meant that the Thais lacked the resources to prosecute a Model 1 or even Model 2 campaign against the CPT. Resource scarcity narrowed the set of feasible strategies and made Model 3 the only untested option. Similarly, American military aid amplified the voice of the military in counterinsurgent strategy – a classic example of the

¹⁰²⁶ David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 90.

¹⁰²⁷ Ibid., Kusuma, pp. 253.

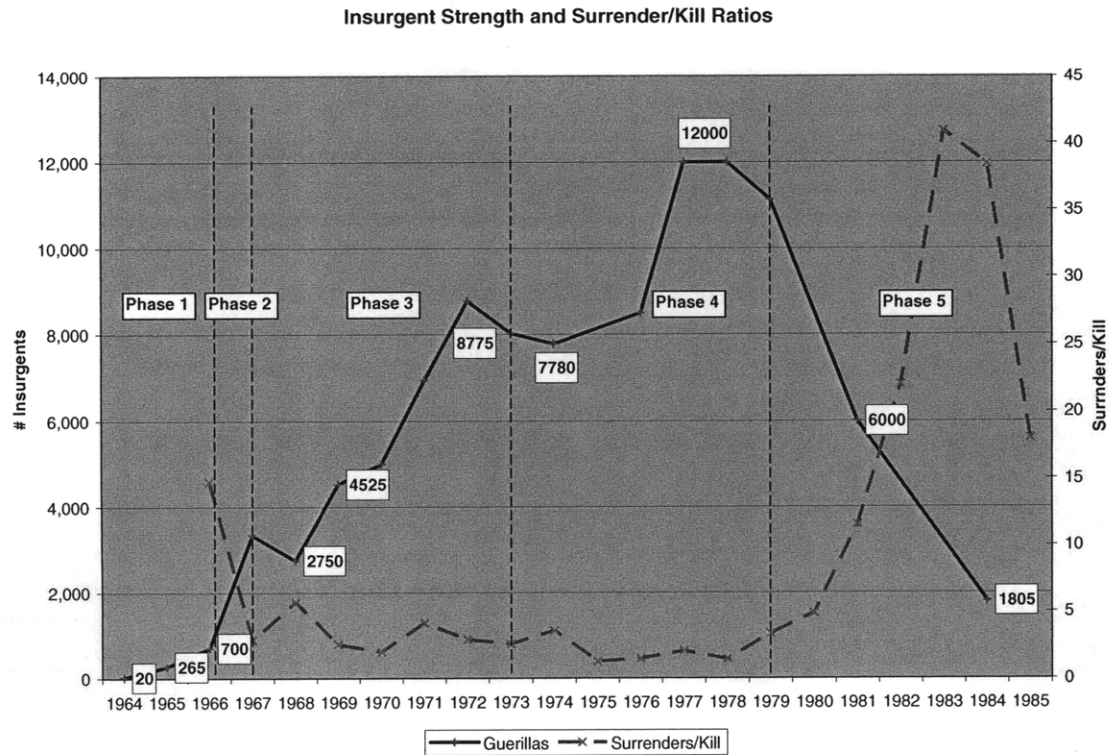
resource weighting of influence. Before 1965, when resource flows were modest, and a significant portion of those flows went to the police as opposed to the military, the military was first among equals in the counterinsurgency realm. Once JUSMAG's military assistance budgets dwarfed the aid flows from the CIA and USAID, the Thai military and its U.S. military advisers dominated strategic choice. Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the rising tide of military aid swept away the foundations of Saiyud's Model 2 strategy and replaced it with a classic Model 1 formula.

The composition of American military aid was also very significant. During the aid surges of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the vast majority of the American aid came in the form of capital equipment: helicopters, artillery pieces, armored vehicles, etc.. The provision of tools whose only utility lay in the realm of conventional combat accelerated the swing from Model 2 to Model 1. Presented with shipment after shipment of hammers, the Thai military spent a decade looking for nails.

The Thai case is also useful for what it shows about swings in task pressure. Unlike the French and British cases, the Thai case involved a domestic threat to the regime. In theory, task pressure can be thought of in crude, categorical terms. If task pressure is a function of the threat to state survival or interests, then it is at its maximum in domestic insurgency, its midpoint in expeditionary insurgency, and its minimum in peacetime. In practice, however, task pressure is more continuous. Rebellions are most likely to erupt in areas where state control and state interests are at their minima. While the Thai state was more intimately concerned with affairs inside its borders in 1965 than France was with events in Indochina in the late 1940s, unrest on the periphery did not elicit a strong response until it posed a clear threat to state survival. As task pressure

ratcheted up with a series of political shocks – American withdrawal, North Vietnamese victory, and the invasion of Cambodia – the Thai military began to take greater interest in solving the insurgency. It was this dramatic escalation in task pressure, combined with relative resource scarcity and Prem's individual insight, which explains the dramatic shift to Model 3 strategy in 1980.

The Thai case also illustrates the soporific effect of military control over counterinsurgent strategy. With the exception of the period between 1973 and 1975, the Thai army controlled both the state and the military. Consequently, the search for counterinsurgent strategy took place within the army cloister. This professional monopoly explains the very long delays in exploration between 1968 and 1973 and 1973 and 1980. As in the French and British cases, Model 2 and Model 3 advocates were rare in the overall military population. Under these conditions, the process of promotion and leadership selection tended to drive the military back towards the institutional presets and, by extension, Model 1 strategy. Over a fifteen year period, the only senior commanders who showed strong, a priori Model 2 or Model 3 leanings were Saiyud, Prem, and Chaovalit. Consequently, there was a strong tendency for Thai strategy to oscillate between Model 1 and Model 2 with Model 1 emerging as the preferred strategy of the median senior commander.



General Saiyud's reaction to the collapse of the CPT insurgency in the 19080s provides additional evidence of the power of the military operational code and its incompatibility with Model 3. As the graph above shows, the CPT collapsed as a result of mass surrender rather than battlefield attrition; the ratio of CPT surrendering to CPT killed in action rose from 3:1 in 1979 to 40:1 by 1983. The historical record strongly suggests that this was the product of internal tensions within the CPT, increased military pressure, and a generous and credible amnesty. Writing two years after the collapse of the CPT, however, General Saiyud argued that the mass surrenders were a Communist plot to survive the campaign and subvert the Thai state:

From the military standpoint, the new [Communist] strategy thus implies a major adjustment in the CPT's approach to warfare that requires a movement of its armed cadres from the jungles and hills to the plains, towns, and cities as quickly an inexpensively as possible. This shift has been considerably facilitated by the government's "open arms" policy towards communists. In fact, it is reasonable to assume that the major so-called 'surrenders' have taken place largely at the initiative of the CPT as a means of implementing its changed strategy. At the same time, government policy

has served to inflict damage on the party and limit its operations to a degree which the party leadership had probably not foreseen. But the CPT is attempting to remedy the situation.¹⁰²⁸

Whereas Model 3 advocates such as Generals Prem and Chavalit were comfortable with a solution in which former insurgents were granted amnesty and political status in return for submission, General Saiyud was deeply suspicious of any outcome that involved the transformation of onetime enemies into citizens. This split interpretation highlights the philosophical gulf separating Models 2 and 3. For Model 2 the key is direct control and individual roles, particularly among the insurgents, are regarded as fixed; tools designed to move individuals from one end of the resistance spectrum to the other, such as amnesty or positive rewards, are viewed with some mix of skepticism and revulsion. For Model 3 advocates, by contrast, the object of the struggle is to convince individuals and groups to rejoin the state's coalition through some mix of force and targeted concession.

¹⁰²⁸ Ibid., Saiyud Kerdpol, pp. 168.

Chapter 9

Conclusion: The Theory and its Rivals

Two puzzles motivate this study. Why do militaries struggle to develop effective counterinsurgency strategies? Why doesn't their performance improve across successive counterinsurgency campaigns? The first chapter lays out the most common existing explanations for military learning dysfunction in counterinsurgency. The second chapter develops a new theory, one that seeks to explain the origins and persistence of particular patterns of intrawar and interwar learning failure. The theory contends that the problem is not one of insensitivity or sloth; the historical record shows that militaries are active but dysfunctional learners. Instead, a specific set of professional beliefs and bureaucratic preferences distort military response and adaptation, producing dysfunctional patterns of intrawar adaptation and interwar retention. These two causal constants explain the existence of dominant patterns; a small number of independent variables, notably resource scarcity and civilian participation, explain deviation from these patterns. Ironically, militaries choose the most effective counterinsurgent strategies when their choice is severely constrained.

The second part of the study examines the validity of this new theory using a series of historical cases. Chapters Three, Four and Five trace the development of French counterinsurgent strategies from the start of the Indochina War through the withdrawal from Algeria in 1962. In each of these chapters, we examine the French strategic choice at a series of decision nodes in an effort to explain strategic change and strategic stasis. Chapter Six evaluates the fit between the theoretical predictions of the model and the observed behavior.

In Part III of the dissertation, we examine the external validity and explanatory range of the theory using three shadow cases. While the French cases demonstrate the role of the military operational code, bureaucratic preferences and independent variables in explaining strategic choice, they do so within the confines of a single national and historical tradition. The three shadow cases, two British and one Thai, suggest that the theory and its predictions travel across national boundaries across the divide separating domestic and expeditionary counterinsurgency. Confronted with the common problem of insurgency, French, British and Thai military leaders responded in remarkably similar and dysfunctional ways.

Rival Theories and the Cases

In Chapter One, we divided the leading explanations of learning dysfunction in counterinsurgency into three categories: experience, culture, and constraints. As noted in Chapter One, many of these “folk theories” of learning dysfunction are plausible but thinly supported. The range of cases examined in this study further undermines these alternative explanations. We find no compelling evidence in the five cases that these alternative theories explain the observed patterns of behavior. Where they predict variation on the basis of culture or experience, we see similarity. Where they predict negative relationships between constraints and strategic choice, we see the opposite: the blessings of scarcity and compromise and the curses of abundance and ruthlessness. In short, the six cases in this study weaken the empirical validity of the most common explanations for intrawar and interwar learning dysfunction.

Experience? Serial Amnesia

Many studies of counterinsurgency suggest that learning dysfunction in counterinsurgency is a function of experience. Learning failure is chalked up to a lack of experience, the overwhelming influence of the “last war,” rational expectations of conventional war, an inability to process raw experience into usable lessons, or simple insensitivity to experience. Successful learning, defined in terms of improved initial response, wartime adaptation and interwar retention, is seen as a product of a given military’s stock of counterinsurgency experience, similar challenges in the “last war,” expectations of counterinsurgency, robust learning processes and high receptivity to change.

Neither the French nor the British cases support the hypothesis that task performance increases with experience. Both militaries had faced a series of insurgent challenges dating back to the 18th century with mixed results. Both national traditions had produced major and widely distributed works on the problems of colonial rebellion.¹⁰²⁹ In all four cases (Indochina, Algeria, Palestine and Malaya), the militaries had extensive experience in the specific areas where the rebellions broke out; in each case the counterinsurgent power had previously waged either an insurgency (Malaya) or a counterinsurgency (Indochina, Algeria, Palestine) in the same geographical area. This experience base did nothing to improve the initial response, subsequent adaptation or interwar retention. In all four cases, the militaries responded to the outbreak of violence

¹⁰²⁹Louis Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey, *Du rôle colonial de l’armée* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1900); Joseph-Simon Gallieni, *Gallieni au Tonkin (1892-1896) par lui-même* (Paris:); Henry d’Ideville, *Maréchal Bueaud, d’après sa correspondance intime et des documents inédits, 1784-1849, Tome Premier* (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot, 1881); Colonel C.E. Calwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, Third Edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); Major General Sir Charles Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (Edinburgh: MacMillan & Co., Ltd, 1936); H.J. Simson, *British Rule, and Rebellion* (London: William Blackwood & Sons, Ltd., 1938).

with Model 1. The French and the British both responded to Model 1 stalemate with exploitation – some mix of process improvement and escalation. Although the experience in Indochina and Palestine underline the limits of small war, they emerged from these Model 1 defeats only to apply the same formula in the opening rounds of Algeria and Malaya.

The military with the least direct experience in counterinsurgency, the Thai military, responded in much the same way. Fighting a counterinsurgent campaign in their own territory meant that the state and military were very familiar with the insurgent groups they confronted. Their close observation of the insurgency in Malaya and their intense interest in the First and Second Indochina wars did nothing to help them overcome the obstacles to initial response, subsequent adaptation or retention. While the Thais eventually won their two decade campaign against the CPT, this did nothing to shield them from the Model 1 reflex in 2004.

The popular “last war” hypothesis proves equally suspect. While the French response in Indochina could be linked to the World War II experience, it is telling that Leclerc’s 1945 reconquest was the high water mark of French strategy in Indochina. If the “last war” syndrome were the cause of the Model 1 fixation in Indochina, we would expect to see it in the initial response. Similarly, the ostensible case for a “last war” response in Palestine must be qualified. The British army had fought a counterinsurgency campaign between 1936 and 1939 in the same territory and was very familiar with the leaders and armed groups of the later Jewish insurgency. In spite of this very recent experience in the theater, they responded to violence with a Model 1 strategy.

But it is the second campaigns of the French, British, and Thais that demolish the “last war” hypothesis. With less than a year separating the end of their first and second counterinsurgency campaigns, the French and British applied the unsuccessful Model 1 strategies of the previous episodes. In the Algerian case in particular, we have ample evidence that the military had identified the weaknesses of the Model 1 approach and still failed to apply their Model 2 recommendations for over two years. Though the first and second Thai episodes were separated by two decades, the result was essentially the same. An experienced military applied a Model 1 solution rather than the winning Model 3 strategies of the “last war.”

Rational expectations of conventional war do little to explain this pattern of behavior. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the French and British leadership were squarely focused on the problem of colonial consolidation. It was not until the late 1940s and early 1950s that the Cold War challenge introduced a clear tradeoff between major conventional war and colonial campaigns. In Palestine and Indochina, both powers expected colonial unrest and responded in ways they deemed appropriate. In 1948, on the eve of the Malayan Emergency, there was nothing to indicate an immediate conventional threat on the European central front. In Algeria, the French disregarded clear warnings of imminent rebellion in North Africa, preferring instead to reorient their military efforts towards the more distant but conventional and atomic challenge of great power war in Europe.

Learning dysfunction appears to have little to do with information flows or the processing of lessons. There is almost no support for the argument that the French, British or Thai armies were organizationally inert. All three dedicated significant energy

and resources to improving the mobility, firepower and precision of their forces. The French and British both excelled at extracting the tactical lessons of Model 1 campaigning; the lessons learned studies and doctrinal publications of the 1950s show an intense interest in change at the level of routines. This ferment at the routine level stands in sharp contrast to stagnation and mean reversion at the strategic level. All three militaries improved their ability to apply violence. All three failed to improve their understanding of the relationship between the application of violence and mass politics.

The experiences of all three powers strongly suggest that the problem was not one of information processing in the mechanical sense; the real issue was what was learned, what was ignored, and what was expunged. Guessing the shape of the next war is inherently difficult; it requires that the observer not only understand causation in one episode but identify the relevance to a separate episode.¹⁰³⁰ If this is true, then we should expect interwar adaptation to be fraught with error and that those errors should be widely distributed. What we see in French, British and Thai cases is fundamentally different. Instead of being widely or randomly distributed, the interwar errors of all three militaries were essentially identical. The similarity of the strategic responses, adaptive problems and selective retention indicate that some underlying, shared trait or traits are producing similar outcome across a range of ostensibly dissimilar militaries and circumstances.

¹⁰³⁰ William Fuller, "What is a Military Lesson?" in Bradley Lee (ed.), *Strategic Logic and Political Rationality: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 38-59.

Culture? Variation Predicted and Absent

One of the most popular explanations for variation in learning performance is national or organizational culture. According to this line of argument, variation in beliefs and preferences will lead nations and organizations to respond differently to the same stimulus. If this is true, we should expect to see wide variation in initial response, intrawar adaptation and interwar retention on this basis. Some militaries should outperform others within a given domain and these performance advantages should be traceable to specific beliefs, preferences, or historical experiences. In the conventional historiography, sharp contrasts are typically drawn between British military proficiency in counterinsurgency and French ineptitude.

The cases examined here do not support these propositions. Where national and organizational culture arguments predict variation in organizational response we find instead nearly universal conformity. French, British and Thai militaries produce the same initial responses and encounter the same problems with intrawar adaptation and interwar retention. Median military leaders from all three traditions behaved in strikingly similar fashion.

Constraints? The Blessings of Scarcity and Costs of Brutality

Another familiar explanation of learning failure focuses on the role of external constraints. The argument is that militaries could improve their performance in counterinsurgency if only they were given sufficient resources and full freedom of action. Armed with additional manpower, materiel, and freed from the constraints of civilized warfare, militaries would be able to crush resistance in short order.

Resources? Manpower Surplus and High Cost Failure

As noted in Chapter One, there is very little empirical support for widely held belief in the positive relationship between manpower levels and success in counterinsurgency. The cases examined here further undermine the Quinlivan hypothesis: the notion that successful stabilization demands a minimum of 20 security forces for every 1,000 inhabitants. While there is abundant evidence in the Indochina, Algeria, Malaya and Thai cases that low force ratios are associated with the outbreak of insurgency, there is almost no evidence that massive reinforcement is an effective treatment once fighting has erupted. French Algeria and British Palestine are near perfect illustrations of the limits of manpower escalation. In French Algeria, French force levels peaked at around 612,000 in a country whose Muslim population was nine and a half million. If the force ratio is calculated using the total Muslim and pied noir population, the Quinlivan ratio is 58.22. If the ratio is calculated using only the Muslim population as a base, the ratio rises to 64.55. If we exclude the two million Algerian Muslims confined in resettlement camps at this time, the ratio reaches 82.69. All these figures are three to four times the Quinlivan threshold of 20.

In Palestine, the British sought to extinguish Jewish resistance by weight of numbers. In the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, Whereas British force ratios in the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939 had peaked at 22.7, they reached 61.8 during the Jewish Revolt of 1945-1947. Here again, this is a conservative estimate of the forces employed against the subject population. If the ratio is calculated using the Jewish population alone as a base, the force ratio rises to 197 security forces per 1,000 inhabitants – almost ten times the

Quinlivan threshold. Incredibly, the British military's faith in numbers was undiminished in the aftermath of this experiment. With one British soldier for every five Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, a number of British officers argued that they had lacked the force levels necessary to enforce martial law.

Even in the less extreme cases of British Malaya and Thailand, the positive contributions of manpower appear to have been overstated. In both cases, the increase in the number of security forces did not translate into major gains until Model 3 strategies were adopted. The Briggs stalemate (1950-1951) and the Thai stalemate (1965-1979) suggest that simple reinforcement is seldom the path to the suppression of violence let alone the restoration of political authority. What is more, misplaced faith in the power of numbers delayed the search for Model 3 strategies in both cases. Search was an afterthought so long as additional reinforcements remained available.

Scruples?

Other authors have argued that constraints on the use of violence are the fundamental obstacle to success in counterinsurgency. If states are free to use violence, then they can eradicate their opponents and cow the population into submission. When these choices are removed in order to preserve public support for the campaign, militaries are unable to resolve the problem of resistance. If these arguments are valid, then we should expect to see three things. First, restrictions on the use of violence should impede learning and task performance. Second, the absence of restrictions on the use of violence should be associated with improved learning and task performance. Third, the same

generalizations should hold within cases; sharp increases in the use of violence should translate into counterinsurgent gains.

The cases examined here suggest that these ideas are false. In practice, nominal restrictions on the use of violence against insurgents and civilians were routinely circumvented, particularly in the early phases of each campaign. In Indochina, Algeria, Palestine, Malaya, and Thailand, militaries often relaxed restrictions on the use of violence without guidance from civilian authorities. The presence of early state terror in every case undermines the notion that military choice is heavily constrained.

Nor were the most permissive periods associated with durable gains in security. The case of French Algeria is an illustration of the limits of coercion. The escalation of state terror, including the use of resettlement, torture, summary executions, and free fire zones, increased pressure on the insurgents at the cost of alienating the target population. The combination of staggering force levels and extensive use of violence by security forces did not translate into an improved outcome. Instead, such strategies appeared to solidify opposition to the state, forcing the counterinsurgent to maintain high levels of force in perpetuity simply to maintain the stalemate.

Within each case, increases in state coercion tended to inflame the situation rather than resolve it. Informal terror tended to be at its maximum in the early stages of each case. Such strategies were generally unsuccessful in the extreme; insurgent force levels and violence tended to rise in response to counterinsurgent excesses. Official efforts to increase coercion, as in the middle phases of Algeria and Malaya, did not produce the desired results. While resettlement, food control, and other instruments of population control could break the physical links between the population and the insurgents, the

collateral political damage made it difficult to capitalize on the military gains. While guerillas tended to suffer, opposition among affected populations rose in parallel. Instead of breaking the guerilla movements, such Model 2 strategies tended to produce new, high cost stalemates.

By contrast, moves to curb collective responsibility were strongly associated with improvements in security. When the authorities curtailed the use of coercion, or relaxed it in return for submission, the results were often beneficial. Effective restraint was associated with rapid improvement in a number of the cases. Under the Lyttelton/Templer policy in Malaya, the relaxation of collective responsibility led to increased Chinese support for the government, major decreases in insurgent violence and a surge in surrenders. In the Thai case, the mass surrenders of the early 1980s followed a conscious effort to curtail the use of violence against civilian populations. This appears to be the common theme connecting the collapse of the Communist insurgencies in Malaya and Thailand. The turning point in each case was the announcement of individual and collective amnesty provisions and a conditional relaxation of state coercion on the subject populations.

The Theory and the Cases

Part One of this study presents a new explanation for the puzzles of learning dysfunction in counterinsurgency. The military operational code, a set of deeply held professional beliefs, leads militaries to misunderstand insurgency. Confronted with mass violence, militaries classify insurgency as a subspecies of war and apply their repertoire of proven strategies and measures. This illusion of familiarity leads to inappropriate

response, delayed strategic search and distorted late war interpretations of politics. When militaries do come to understand what effective counterinsurgency demands, they dislike the solution. A category of conflict that undermines the organization's core interests in resources, autonomy and prestige proves deeply unpopular on a bureaucratic level. Organizational revulsion explains the slow adoption of winning strategies in times of war and their rapid elimination in times of peace.

The relative weight of these two causal influences, one cognitive and the other bureaucratic, depends on the level of task pressure. Task pressure is defined as the threat the insurgency poses to state survival or vital state interests. When task pressure is high, as in many cases of domestic insurgency, militaries subordinate bureaucratic preferences to problem solving and the influence of the military operational code is dominant. When task pressure disappears in the interwar period, long term bureaucratic preferences emerge as the leading influence on organizational retention with the operational code playing a supporting role. When the state is engaged in expeditionary counterinsurgency, and task pressure is at an intermediate level, the military operational code is the leading influence and bureaucratic preferences play a supporting role.

The Dominant Patterns

In wartime, the military operational code produces a dominant pattern of learning. Seeing in mass violence the familiar outlines of interstate war, militaries believe are confident they understand the task. This illusion of familiarity leads them to apply Model 1: the small war solution to internal resistance. Under these strategies, the military seeks to kill or capture the guerillas and cow the population into submission. Model 1

strategies typically produce a combination of tactical success and campaign stalemate. The military typically wins most tactical engagements but fails to make cumulative progress in reducing violence or enemy end strength. This sets up a learning trap in which small victories and skewed performance weighting reinforce the attachment to an ineffective strategy. The military responds to stalemate with exploitation: a mixture of process improvement and material and normative escalation.

When the exploitation response fails to produce results, militaries often shift from small war (Model 1) to political war (Model 2). The focus of the campaign shifts from an attack on the guerillas to population control. The military targets the population and employs a new range of tools including economic development and psychological operations. While the shift from Model 1 to Model 2 involves significant changes at the strategic and operational level, it retains the underlying coercive framework of the operational code. The military addresses the political dimension of insurgency by militarizing politics. As in Model 1, the object in Model 2 is to apply positive and negative sanctions to compel unilateral submission.

While Model 2 strategies increase pressure on the guerillas and the population, they seldom produce stable, low cost state control. Effective prosecution of political war is even more manpower intensive than small war against the guerillas and success in suppressing violence can lead to a new, higher cost stalemate. Frustration with the incomplete resolution of the insurgency or the cost of maintaining that order, typically leads militaries to return to some form of military escalation. Unable to master the political domain, militaries return to the battlefield in the hopes that some combination of population control and renewed attack on the guerillas will deliver victory.

Militaries seldom adopt Model 3 strategies voluntarily. Generally it takes some combination of prolonged failure, resource scarcity and high civilian participation to force such a choice. The greatest conceptual leap is from Model 2 to Model 3 and the results of that leap are the least stable. Militaries must unlearn the militarized politics of Model 2 and learn the entirely novel paradigm of political exchange. This new strategy is incompatible with the military operational code and the underlying bureaucratic preferences of the military. When the constraints on choice are lifted, either by the provision of additional resources or the disappearance of task pressure, militaries are quick to purge Model 3 strategies.

The Theory and the Evidence

The theory provides an explanation with far greater validity and explanatory range than its rivals. Examination of the five episodes in this study reveals far more similarity than dissimilarity in military responses to counterinsurgency. The military operational code and its associated mechanisms are evident in every case. The French, British and Thai militaries all succumbed to the illusion of familiarity in the early phases of their campaigns. All saw the answer to rebellion in some form of small war on the guerillas; all initially discounted the significance of the population. In Indochina, Algeria, Palestine, Malaya and Thailand, early Model 1 response produced the same paradox of small tactical victories and campaign stalemate. A narrow focus on military measures of effectiveness, combined with implicit assumptions about the permanence and cumulative nature of the “small victories,” led to an exploitation response. Rather

than search for alternatives, militaries refined existing strategies and increased the level of resources and decreased restrictions on the use of force.

In every case save the abbreviated British campaign in Palestine, Model 1 exploitation was followed by the adoption of some Model 2 strategy based on population control.¹⁰³¹ Under Model 2, the military occupational code produced a different learning trap. Unable to measure the political effects of their strategies, militaries measured the performance of their own specified tasks: civic action, psychological operations, resettlement, etc. The shift from measures of effectiveness to measures of performance reinforced militaries' attachment to Model 2 solutions.

In the three cases where militaries adopted full blown Model 2 strategies, the result was a different kind of high cost stalemate. In Algeria, Malaya and Thailand, militaries found that population control could suppress or at least contain violence. The problems were cost and open ended commitment. Such measures required large commitments of troops and once these measures were put in place it proved difficult to remove them without reigniting resistance. In Algeria, de Gaulle's recognition of this dilemma led to a late Model 3 gamble and failure. In Malaya, Lyttelton and Templer forged a Model 3 solution based on concessions to Chinese and Malaya leaders and local Chinese communities.

Task performance played in decisions to explore alternative strategies. Militaries seldom searched for alternatives so long as they believed that they were succeeding or that exploitation could translate tactical success into campaign victory. Prolonged stalemate occasionally prompted strategic change. In Algeria, Salan's inability to roll

¹⁰³¹ I include Indochina here because Salan started significant experiments in population control under his in 1952 and 1953.

back FLN progress in 1958 that precipitated de Gaulle's Model 3 concessions and the later Challe offensives. In the Thai case, however, we see how long stalemate and even trend failure can persist before search is undertaken. Between the outbreak of the insurgency in 1965 and the change of government in 1973, the Thai military pursued a course of Model 1 exploitation broken only by a one year, Model 2 experiment. Trend failure was somewhat more effective in stimulating search. Serial relapses in the pacified areas of Tonkin between 1950 and 1953 prompted Salan's Model 2 experiments and Navarre later return to Model 1 campaigning. Sustained deterioration in security in Algeria between 1956 and 1957 did prompt a shift from Model 1 strategy to Model 2.

Episodic failure was the rarest but most powerful spur to action. The shock of Suez in 1956 paved the way for the Model 2 transition of Salan. The death of Gurney in Malaya in October 1951 set in motion the chain of events that would lead to Model 3 strategy by early 1952. The fall of Cao Bang in 1950 in Indochina case offers a twist on this effect. This catastrophic defeat opened the door for search, but de Lattre chose to forgo a change in strategy in favor of renewed exploitation of Model 1.

While failure often prompted exploration, it did little to influence the result. Here civilian participation and resources played the most important roles. High levels of civilian participation increased the chances that initial response would be conscious rather than patterned. In the early phases of Indochina and Algeria, high levels of civilian involvement led to important Model 3 initiatives. Civilians forced military leaders to explain their choice of Model 1 and for a time managed to impose Model 3 alternatives. Parallel evaluation of performance was clear in four of the five cases. In Indochina, Algeria, Palestine and Malaya, civilian leaders produced very different evaluations of

performance than their military peers. Civilian administrators were more attuned to the political costs of successful military operations and more willing to entertain notions of concession on the national and local levels. Civilian familiarity with norms of political exchange made them more likely to advocate Model 3 solutions. Politicians accustomed to logrolling were more likely to arrive at *quid pro quo* solutions to political violence than military leaders accustomed to simple compellence. It is not accidental that the major amnesty initiatives and proposals for political engagement in Indochina, Algeria, Palestine, and Malaya had their origin in civilian circles.

Resource levels played a powerful role in shaping strategic choice. Whereas the conventional wisdom holds that resource abundance is the key to success in counterinsurgency, the cases suggest the opposite. Militaires chose Model 3 solutions only under the pressure of resource scarcity. When manpower and military equipment were abundant, the overwhelming temptation was to resolve the problem of rebellion through the application of force. This curse of abundance was evident in all five cases. In Indochina the surge of reinforcements in 1946 helped unravel Leclerc's Model 3 condominium. In Algeria, the surge of reinforcements and a spike in rebel violence in the summer of 1955 undermined Soustelle's Model 3 strategy and paved the way for a disastrous Model 1 escalatory cycle. In Malaya, the expansion of the military forces and police between 1948 and 1951 served as a substitute for strategic thought. In Thailand, the geyser of American military assistance between 1967 and 1973 explains the regression of Thai strategy and the resulting attachment to Model 1 theories of victory.

When resources were too scarce to support Model 1 or Model 2 strategies, militaries were often forced to explore Model 3 solutions. Extreme scarcity helps explain

Leclerc's embrace of Model 3 strategy in 1945. Similarly, Soustelle appears to have gained a Model 3 toehold because the French military did not yet possess the resources to pursue a comprehensive Model 1 campaign across Algeria. The Thai case offers the clearest evidence that sharp downturns in resources, particularly when they are accompanied by rising threats, can force militaries towards political solutions to rebellion. As the figures on American assistance show, the Thai military clung to Model 1 strategy as long as military aid and American troop presence were high. Once both had been removed, and North Vietnamese advances had increased task pressure, the Thais chose a Model 3 strategy based on amnesty and a new social contract between the center and the border regions.

On rare occasions, changes in resources and civilian participation worked at cross purposes. When resources and civilian participation rose together, it tended to increase civil-military friction. In 1955, Soustelle sought to impose Model 3 strategies as the pace of French reinforcement accelerated. In that case, rising resources translated into rising military influence and Model 1 escalation was the result. Five years later, de Gaulle's Model 3 advocacy collided with high resource levels and Model 2 strategy of General Challe. Here again the result was civil-military crisis. In cases where civilian participation and resources fell in tandem, resources emerged as the dominant influence. In Thailand in the late 1970s, steep declines in resources and rising external threats meant that the Thai military had to find some lower cost solution to the CPT problem.

Contributions of the Study

Good social science explains the existence of important behavioral patterns and the origins of change. This study addresses the problems states face in ending rebellions. This problem is ancient and the patterns enduring. If rebellion is as old as authority, then the problems of restoring authority are just as old. Although the challenge is very old, state and particularly military responses appear curiously static and dysfunctional. Militaries consistently struggle to develop effective responses to insurgency. Stranger still, they seem unable to apply insights gained in one campaign to similar problems in the future.

While there has been steady progress in the study of rebellion, the study of the restoration of authority has lagged considerably. After a surge of serious academic inquiry in the 1960s and 1970s, the systematic study of counterinsurgency entered a dark age populated almost exclusively by memoirs, single case studies, national histories and practitioners' cookbooks. While the raw material for serious inquiry into counterinsurgency accumulated, the field remains a theoretical wasteland. Consequently, the gap between our understanding of why men rebel and why men obey again has only widened over the past two decades.

This study seeks to close this gap by explaining the choices states make and their effects. In so doing, it seeks to correct the historicist bent of the field that has sought explanations for broadly shared, professional dysfunction in the particular features of single cases or single national traditions.

The explanation that I develop here has significance outside the narrow boundaries of insurgency. It resides at the perilous intersection of the study of ideas and

material interests. One of the central insights of this study is that military choice cannot be explained in purely ideational or purely material terms. Instead, it is the interaction of beliefs and material preferences that explains the dominant patterns of organizational learning and important deviations from those patterns.

This study supports the recent arguments about the limits of objective control in civil-military relations.¹⁰³² The restoration of state authority demands active civilian participation and military cooperation with civil government. While this level of cooperation forces the military to surrender a significant amount of autonomy, this compromise is essential if states are to fashion durable, low cost solutions to the problem of authority. In the absence of civilian input, militaries are likely to pursue self-defeating strategies based on counter-guerilla war or the militarization of politics.

The study also validates important insights of the existing literature on military innovation. Task pressure and civilian intervention appear to be central to explaining strategic choice.¹⁰³³ Similarly, the absence of appropriate measures of effectiveness does impede wartime learning.¹⁰³⁴

While this study supports these findings, it departs from the orthodox explanations in others areas. While most studies of military innovation have focused on major changes in doctrine or strategy and excluded tactical innovation, this study argues that the two categories of change compete for the finite attention and resources of the organization and the state. The exploitation of existing strategies and the exploration of new ones are competitive goods, and exploitation generally holds an important advantage

¹⁰³² Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002).

¹⁰³³ Ibid., Posen, pp. 233.

¹⁰³⁴ Ibid., Rosen, pp. 114, 121.

in this competition. Second, this study suggests that innovation in counterinsurgency is more difficult than innovation in other military domains. Innovation often forces entrepreneurs to confront existing stakeholders. But even in the most heated internal disputes over mission priorities and community interests, the military operational code remains largely undisturbed. Factions can argue about the most efficient and effective ways to apply violence to an opponent. But very seldom do they question the utility of force or the relationship between its exercise and mass political behavior. Effective adaptation in counterinsurgency requires militaries to overthrow or at least suspend the most basic causal beliefs and frames of their profession. They must abandon the simple causal beliefs and measures of battle in favor of the ambiguity of politics. In the realm of counterinsurgency, then, it is the specific content of the innovation and its incompatibility with deeply held beliefs and preferences that explains the failure to adopt optimal strategies.

Third, optimism about military led, peacetime innovation appears misplaced. Absent the immediate pressure of war, militaries will not develop the strategies and measures of effectiveness necessary to tackle similar problems in the future. Instead, they will devote considerable effort to expunging the most important lessons of counterinsurgent strategy. They will do so because they the solutions are incompatible with their causal beliefs and deeply threatening to their most basic organizational interests in autonomy, resources, and prestige.